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THE

CHILD'S COMMENTATOR

ON

THE BIBLE,

FOR

THE HOME CIRCLE.

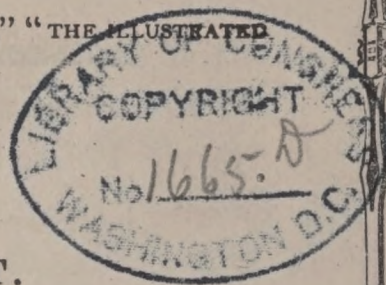
BY

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AUTHOR OF "COBBIN'S DOMESTIC BIBLE," "PORTABLE COMMENTARY," "THE ILLUSTRATED
NEW TESTAMENT WITH NOTES," ETC., ETC.

WITH AN INTRODUCTION

BY DR. L. P. BROCKETT.



"From a child thou hast known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus."—2 TIM. iii. 15.

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INTRODUCTION.

"A COMMENTATOR for Children!" exclaims some confirmed grumbler, after reading our title page. "Well, what will they get up next for children? Books for them fairly swarm on our shelves, now; and here comes a writer who undertakes to get up a Commentary for them. What is the use? They never had any such nonsense when I was a child." Probably not, friend. If they had you might have understood God's blessed word better, and have learned that this fault-finding spirit is specially rebuked there.

But who needs brief, simple and clear explanations of the Word of God to help him to understand its narratives, its instructions, and its commands, more than the child? Grown people find serious difficulty in understanding many portions of the Sacred Book, for want of knowledge of the changes of sense in the words used, the character of the people to whom it was addressed, and the manners and customs which prevailed when it was written. And if these difficulties are so great that most intelligent adults require some explanatory work to help them to understand it, why should not a child require such aid, in a much larger degree?

To them, the language is new, the people very different from those they see around them daily, and though the truths are highly important, yet they seem to them afar off, and as if delivered to a strange nation.

It was from a deep conviction of this need, on the part of





the young, of something which should lead them to study with greater pleasure and larger profit, God's holy Word, that the late Rev. Ingram Cobbin, a most devout and learned student of the Scriptures, was led to prepare the CHILD'S COMMENTATOR, a work which has received the highest praise from all quarters in England. In adapting it to the wants of young American readers, the American editor has found some changes needful, mostly those which should make portions of the Sacred narrative a little plainer to the comprehension of the child, and also a few alterations from English to American money, weights, measures, etc. But as far as possible the original text, with its inimitable clearness and simplicity has been preserved. Having thus given the motives which prompted both the author and the American editor to prepare this work for the young, let us now proceed to state a few reasons why we deem the study and knowledge of God's Word so important for the child, even in tender years.

The Bible is especially adapted to the young. Its narratives are so plain and simple, yet so faithful to life and so touching in their pathos and beauty, that they are pre-eminently adapted to the comprehension of the young. Its pictures are indeed mostly in outline, but the imagination of the child once roused is adequate to the perfecting of the landscape. Many of these narratives too are about children, and the child of our own time may well be interested in learning of the boy Samuel, devoted to the service of God by his mother ; of the little ruddy shepherd boy of Bethlehem ; of the young Solomon ; of Josiah and Joash ; of the Shunamite's son ; of the Jewish boys of the captivity ; of the little Miriam, precociously wise and prudent ; of the daughter





INTRODUCTION.

vii

of Jephtha ; of the girlish Ruth, and of the little maidens who sang in the temple choirs, and whose childish play in the streets of Jerusalem made the holy city so attractive. So too in the New Testament, the children of Bethlehem whose sad fate is so briefly but pathetically told ; the daughter of Jairus ; the little ones whom Jesus blessed, and from whose example he instructed his disciples ; the young Timothy, whose early instruction had made him prepared for his call to the missionary work ; and most instructive and touching of all, the infancy and boyhood of Him who took upon Him our nature, and in the helplessness of infancy, the simplicity of boyhood, and the dignity of manhood, never forgot His Father's business, but walked ever in the light of heaven.

But the instructions, the promises, and teachings of the Word of God, not less than its narratives, are intended for the young ; and how important it is, that in their tender years, they should be attracted to these and brought to understand and trust them. All through the blessed Book there are promises and instructions addressed to children, and these are so gracious and loving, that even the youngest child, who hears or reads them, cannot help being drawn toward the good God, and the tender and affectionate Saviour who loved little children so much.

There are so many story books for children in these days, and too many of them very silly and foolish stories, that it is often said that there is danger that children will read these and neglect the Bible. But there is not so much danger of it as many fear, for the stories in the Bible are so much more interesting than any others, that if the children only know about them, they will prefer them to all the story books in the world. More than three hundred and thirty years ago, in





England, the Bible was not easily procured, and for a long time people were forbidden to read it ; at this time an English lady of high rank, who was afterwards queen, gave to a little girl a New Testament to read. She had never seen one before, and night after night she read it by a rush-light, and when once completed she read it through again and again, each time finding something new and interesting in it, and when, in after times, there came terrible persecution, and people were punished and even killed for reading that blessed Book, she rejoiced that she had so much of it hid away in her heart ; and going among those who were imprisoned and tortured for Christ's sake, encouraged them to be true to their Heavenly Master, by repeating to them many portions of the Holy Word which she had committed to memory.

We hope, then, that this book, so carefully prepared for children, will be the means of awakening in their minds a desire to study that book which God has given to us, to teach us how we ought to live and what we ought to do, and which also gives us so beautiful and interesting an account of what good men and women did, in their childhood, thousands of years ago, and above all, what the blessed Jesus said and did when he was on the earth. May He who when He was on earth so loved and cherished little children, make this book of service to them in leading them to Him. L. P. B.

BROOKLYN. Oct., 1872.





PREFACE.

THE Author of this Work has long had the plan of it entered in a list of intended writings for young people; and now, after release from other engagements, embraces an early opportunity of introducing it to the attention of Parents and Teachers.

He hopes that the methods he has adopted will lead the young to love and read the Bible. By explaining certain portions of it in a plain and simple way, and yet incorporating much that is instructive and interesting, they will become familiar with many of those customs, which, being Oriental, are quite strange and unintelligible, not only to the young, but also to those of more mature years; and, by short and pointed remarks, they will learn to see what improvement may be made of the sacred pages, so as not to read them as a mere story.

The short portions selected from the chapters will be likely to impress their minds, and fix important truths and facts in





their memories; and the subjects connected with them will probably be sought for in the Bible without compulsion, which would but too often produce disgust.

The Author hopes, too, that an early knowledge of the Holy Scriptures, with those helps which men of science and piety have afforded for the better understanding of their contents, will so assist in confirming the young mind in the value and knowledge of divine revelation, that it will be the better fortified against those attacks which are so subtilely employed by Infidels to undermine the foundation of the best hopes of dying man.





THE ORIGIN OF MUSIC.

THE PAPER REEDS BY THE BROOKS.





CONTENTS.

	PAGE		PAGE
Creation	25	Joseph in Potiphar's House	103
The Fall of Man.....	28	Joseph in Prison.....	104
The Murder of Abel.....	32	Joseph raised to Honour.....	106
The Death of the oldest Man who ever lived in the World ...	35	Joseph's Brethren in Egypt buy- ing Corn	110
The Flood.....	39	Joseph's Brethren sent home for Benjamin.....	112
The Building of Babel, and Be- ginning of many Languages	41	Joseph's Brethren returned to Egypt	115
Abram	45	The Cup in Benjamin's Sack....	116
Lot	47	Joseph makes himself known to his Brethren	118
Battle of the Kings, and Lot taken Prisoner	48	Jacob goes into Egypt.....	119
Burning of Sodom and Gomorrah	50	Jacob before Pharaoh	120
Hagar and Ishmael	54	Jacob on his Death-bed.....	123
Abraham Offering up his Son Isaac	59	Jacob's Funeral and Joseph's Death	124
The Death of Sarah.....	64	The Children of Israel in Bon- dage.....	129
The Marriage of Isaac and Rebe- kah	65	The Birth and Wonderful Preser- vation of Moses	130
The Death of Abraham.....	70	Moses and the Burning Bush ...	137
Esau selling his Birth-right.....	72	Moses performs Miracles, and goes with Aaron to the Isra- elites	141
Isaac's Prosperity	74	Moses applies to Pharaoh—Pha- raoh's Obstinacy and Cruelty	142
Isaac blessing Jacob	77	Moses again commanded to go to Pharaoh.....	143
Jacob's Dream	80	Beginning of the Ten Plagues of Egypt. The Plague of Blood	143
Jacob and Laban	82	The Plagues of Frogs, of Lice, of Flies	145
Jacob and his Flocks.....	84		
Jacob's Escape from Laban	86		
Jacob and the Angels	88		
Jacob and Esau	90		
The slaying of the Shechemites..	92		
Jacob and the strange Gods	94		
Esau's final removal from Canaan	99		
Joseph and his Brethren.....	99		





PAGE	PAGE
The Plagues of Murrain, of Boils and Blains, and of Rain, Hail, and Fire 147	Commandments, Promises, and Threatenings..... 220
The Plagues of Locusts and Darkness 149	Vows..... 221
Destruction of the First-born of Egypt, and Release of the Children of Israel 151	The Numbering of the Tribes of Israel..... 225
The Departure of the Children of Israel from Egypt, and the Drowning of Pharaoh and his Army in the Red Sea .. 153	The Law concerning Nazarites.. 227
Moses's Song..... 157	The Offerings of the Tribes to the Tabernacle 229
The Israelites fed with Manna.. 163	Directions about the Levites.... 231
Moses smites the Rock—Israel defeats the Amalekites 165	The Pillar of Cloud and Fire ... 233
The Giving of the Law 168	The Silver Trumpets, and March from Sinai..... 237
Laws given to the Israelites by Moses..... 172	The Murmuring Israelites fed with Quails..... 240
The Tabernacle, its Furniture, and Priests 175	Miriam's Leprosy..... 245
The Golden Calf 185	The Twelve Spies sent to Canaan..... 249
Israel again threatened with God's Displeasure..... 188	The Sabbath-breaker stoned to Death 255
The Ten Commandments renewed 189	Korah, Dathan, and Abiram swallowed up..... 258
Offering for the Tabernacle 191	The wonderful Budding of Aaron's Rod 262
Bezaleel and Aholiab filled with wisdom to do the work of the Tabernacle 191	Provisions for the Priests and Levites..... 265
The Burnt-offering..... 193	The Red Heifer 267
The Meat-offering 195	Moses smites a second Rock for Water 268
The Sacrifices..... 196	The First Battles of the Israelites and Canaanites — The Brazen Serpent 270
Consecration and Duties of the Priests..... 201	Balaam and his Ass..... 273
Awful Judgment on Nadab and Abihu 202	Balak disappointed in cursing Israel 277
Laws respecting the Food of the Israelites..... 204	Various Events a little before the Death of Moses:—
Laws on Leprosy..... 209	Idolatry of the Israelites with the Moabites..... 279
The Scape-goat 212	Death of Zimri..... 280
The Blasphemer stoned..... 214	Moses makes War on the Midianites 281
The Year of Jubilee 216	The first Settlement of the Israelites..... 282





CONTENTS.

XV

	PAGE		PAGE
The Limits of the promised Land	283	Gideon judges Israel	344
Laws for the Israelites	287	Gideon's Exploits and Death	346
Remembering the Scriptures	290	King Abimelech	351
The Idol Moloch	291	Jair	353
Charmers or Conjurors	292	Jephthah	353
Land-marks	292	The Birth of Samson	356
The Stubborn Son—False Weights		Samson's Riddle	359
—Doing Mischief to the		His Death	363
Blind	293	The Story of Micah and his Gods	365
Moses warned of his Death—his		The History of Naomi and Ruth	370
Song	297	Young Samuel	376
Moses's Death.—Joshua Leader		Eli's wicked Sons	381
of Israel	298	The History of the Ark	383
Joshua passes Jordan—meets an		Its Restoration to Israel	388
Angel	303	Saul chosen to be King	391
The Spies concealed by Rahab	304	Samuel anointed him	395
The Israelites pass Jordan	305	Saul's Victory over the Ammon-	
The Taking of Jericho	311	ites	396
The Sin of Achan	312	Samuel's farewell Address to Is-	
The Stoning of Achan	313	rael	398
The Taking of Ai	315	Saul rejected from being King	400
The Gibeonites saved by craft	316	Jonathan's bold attack of the	
The five Kings defeated and exe-		Philistines	402
cuted	319	The Amalekites destroyed	406
The Sun and Moon stand still for		David anointed to be King of Is-	
Joshua	320	rael	408
Further Conquests of Joshua	322	David's Victory over Goliath	412
The Land divided by Joshua		Jonathan's love to David	417
among the Tribes	324	Saul's hatred of him, and attempts	
Three Cities of Refuge	331	to take his life	419
Cities given to the Levites	332	David eats the Shew-bread	422
Return home of the two Tribes		David in the Cave of Adullam,	
and a half	333	and the Priests slain by or-	
Death of Joshua	334	der of Saul	425
King Adoni-bezek punished	335	David defeats the Philistines at	
Othniel judges Israel	339	Keilah	428
Ehud judges, and kills King Eg-		Saul's skirt cut off by David	430
lon	339	Samuel's Death	433
Shamgar kills the Philistines		Saul's Spear and Cruse taken	
with an Ox-goad	340	from him while asleep by	
Deborah and Barak judge Israel	341	David	437
The woman Jael kills Sisera	342	David's Flight to Gath, and Re-	
The triumphant Song of Deborah		sidence at Ziklag	439
and Barak	343	The Witch of Endor	440





	PAGE		PAGE
David's march along with the Philistines.....	446	The Executions of Adonijah, of Joab, and of Shimei	523
The Amalekites having plundered and burnt Ziklag are pursued and slain by David.....	448	Solomon's Marriage	524
Saul defeated and slain by the Philistines.....	450	His Dream, and Prayer for Wisdom.....	524
Execution of the Amalekite who slew Saul	453	His Prosperity and Honour	526
Battle between Abner and Joab	455	Preparation for Building the Temple	529
The Murder of Abner by Joab .	458	The Building of the Temple....	531
The Murder of Ishbosheth.....	462	Solomon's Houses.....	533
David King over all Israel.....	463	The Ornaments and Utensils for the Temple.....	534
Removal of the Ark, and solemn Death of Uzzah	465	The Dedication of the Temple..	539
David's Conquests.....	468	Solomon's New Cities and Merchant Ships.....	541
David's Kindness to Mephibosheth	472	The Queen of Sheba's Visit to Solomon	543
David's Ambassadors insulted by the Ammonites.....	473	Solomon's great Riches.....	544
The Murder of Uriah.....	476	His Disobedience to God.....	547
Nathan's Message to David.....	478	Jeroboam chosen King of the Ten Tribes	551
Amnon killed by Absalom.....	481	Rehoboam chosen King of Judah	554
Absalom's Rebellion	484	Jeroboam's Hand withered.....	555
Ziba's base conduct to Mephibosheth	487	The disobedient Prophet . . .	556
Shimei curses David.....	488	The Sins of Jeroboam and Rehoboam	558
Hushai deceives Absalom.....	488	The Reigns of Abijah, Asa, Nadab, and Baasha	561
Ahithophel's wicked counsel defeated by Hushai.....	489	Elijah miraculously fed	567
Absalom's Defeat and Death ...	492	The Widow's Oil and Meal multiplied	568
David's return to Jerusalem....	498	Her Son raised to life	569
Sheba's Rebellion and Death....	501	Baal's false Prophets exposed and slain by Elijah.....	569
Saul's Sons executed	503	Elijah's Flight from Jezebel....	574
David's Psalm of Thanksgiving .	506	The War between Benhadad and Ahab	576
His Heroes.....	511	Naboth robbed of his Vineyard, and murdered by Ahab and Jezebel	583
His Pride in Numbering the People	512	Ahab killed in Battle	585
Adonijah's Conspiracy.....	517	Jehoshaphat's good Reign.....	588
Solomon proclaimed King.....	519		
The Death of David	520		





CONTENTS

	PAGE		PAGE
Sickness and death of Ahaziah	593	The Reigns of Jehoahaz, and Jo-	
Destruction of a hundred of his		ash, Kings of Israel.....	633
Soldiers by Fire from Hea-		Death of the Prophet Elisha....	634
ven	595	The Dead Man raised to Life in	
Elijah taken to Heaven in a Char-		his Sepulchre	635
iot of Fire.....	596	The Reigns of Amaziah, Jerobo-	
Children who mocked Elisha kill-		am, and Joash	635
ed by Bears	599	The Reigns of Azariah, Zachari-	
Israel miraculously supplied with		ah, Shallum, Menahem, Pe-	
Water	600	kahiah, Pekah, and Jotham.	637
The Moabites defeated	602	The Reign of Ahaz, King of Ju-	
Various Miracles by Elisha ...	604	dah	639
The Shunamite's Son raised to		Hoshea, the last King of Israel..	641
Life by Elisha.....	607	The Tribes of Israel carried away	
The deadly Pottage made good .	607	into Captivity.....	642
A Hundred Men fed with Twen-		The good Hezekiah, King of Ju-	
ty small Loaves	608	dah	645
Naaman cured of his Leprosy by		Sennacherib's Army destroyed..	648
Elisha	608	Hezekiah's severe Sickness and	
An Axe made to swim by him..	614	wonderful Recovery	649
The King of Syria's Secrets told		Manasseh's exceedingly wicked	
by Elisha	615	Reign in Judah	650
The Siege of Samaria.....	616	Amon's wicked Reign in Judah .	651
Ben-hadad, King of Syria, mur-		Josiah, the most excellent King	
dered by his Servant Hazael	620	of Judah	652
Jehu anointed to be King of Israel	624	Jehoiakim's Reign, and his Son	
Joram and Ahaziah slain	625	Jehoiachin's short Reign in	
Jezebel killed.....	626	Judah, and the Captivity of	
Ahab's Seventy Sons slain	627	him and his people, by Nebu-	
Usurpation and Death of Atha-		chadnezzar	656
liah	629	Zedekiah's Reign.....	657
The Reign of Joash, King of Ju-		The Destruction of Jerusalem by	
dah	630	Nebuchadnezzar.....	658





	PAGE		PAGE
Distinguishing Marks of the Kings of Israel	662	A solemn Fast of the Jews	12
Characters of the Kings of Judah	663	The People make a Covenant to serve God.....	712
Contemporary Kings of Israel and Judah	664	The Dedication of the Wall of Jerusalem	715
Judah after the Captivity of Israel	666	BOOK OF ESTHER.....	719
THE FIRST BOOK OF CHRONICLES.....	667	Esther made Queen of Persia ..	722
THE SECOND BOOK OF CHRONICLES.....	670	Haman's Exaltation and Plan to destroy the Jews.....	724
EZRA—The Proclamation of Cyrus for Restoring the Temple	677	His Fall and Execution.....	726
Restoration of the Jews from their Captivity in Babylon..	679	Mordecai's Advancement.....	735
The laying of the Foundation of the second Temple.....	681	The Jews' Victory over their enemies	737
The Building of the Temple hindered.....	685	The Feast of Purim established	738
The building of the Temple continued	688	THE BOOK OF JOB.—His History, Riches, and Afflictions	741
Ezra's prosperous Embassy to Babylon, and return to Jerusalem, favoured by King Artaxerxes	690	His Death.....	750
Ezra forwards the work of God at Jerusalem.....	693	Explanatory remarks on the Book of Job	751
Judah's sinful alliances, and general reformation	694	THE BOOK OF PSALMS.....	755
THE BOOK OF NEHEMIAH	696	Explanation of the Design of the Psalms	755
Nehemiah's affliction at the state of Jerusalem.....	699	Their Titles.....	760
The building of the Wall of Jerusalem.....	701	Their Authors.....	766
Nehemiah's noble Conduct towards the Jews	704	THE BOOK OF PROVERBS.....	768
Artifices of Sanballat and his Accomplices to ruin Nehemiah	706	ECCLESIASTES	779
Nehemiah's wise Measures to protect Jerusalem	708	THE SONG OF SOLOMON.....	782
The reading of the Law, and the Feast of Tabernacles	710	The Four Greater Prophets.—1. ISAIAH	786
		Prophesies Explained	786
		Times of the Prophets.....	788
		Table of the Prophets.....	789
		Captivity of the Jews in Babylon	790
		The Release of the Jews by Cyrus.....	790
		2. JEREMIAH.	
		Used Signs as well as Words... ..	793
		His Sufferings for prophesying the Truth	794
		Made a Captive, and set at Liberty	794
		Prophesies respecting Babylon..	795
		Lamentations of Jeremiah.....	795





CONTENTS.

XIX

	PAGE		PAGE
3. EZEKIEL.		The Visit of the Wise Men..... 838	
Prophecies respecting Tyre	796	Herod's cruel Command	841
Prophecies respecting Egypt....	797	Account of John the Baptist....	842
4. DANIEL.		The Baptism of Jesus Christ....	847
Prophecies about the Four great		The Pharisees and Sadducees...	847
Monarchies	798	The Temptation of Jesus Christ.	848
Nebuchadnezzar's golden Image.	798	Jesus chooses his Disciples.....	850
Shadrach, Meshach, and Abedne-		The Miracles of Christ	850
go cast into a Furnace.....	803	His Sermon on the Mount.....	851
Nebuchadnezzar's wonderful		The Beatitudes	852
Dream.....	804	Christ's Exposition of the Law..	854
Dream explained by Daniel....	805	The Scribes and the Publicans..	855
Nebuchadnezzar becomes mad..	805	The Nature of Charity	856
Belshazzar's Feast.....	806	Of Prayer—The Lord's Prayer..	859
The wonderful Writing explain-		Conclusion of Christ's Sermon on	
ed by Daniel	807	the Mount.....	862
Daniel promoted by Darius	808	Miraculous Cure of the Leper...	863
Conspiracy against Daniel	808	The Centurion's Servant healed	864
Daniel accused of praying to God	809	Christ stills the Tempest	867
Daniel thrown into a Den of		Cure of Two Men possessed of	
Lions	809	Devils	868
Extraordinary Vision of Daniel.	810	Call of Matthew.....	869
THE TWELVE MINOR PROPHETS.		Eastern Bottles	871
1. Hosea, 2. Joel, 3. Amos, 4. Oba-		The Ruler's Daughter raised....	872
diah.....	813	Two Blind Men receive Sight...	873
5. Jonah	814	Christ's Twelve Disciples	874
Swallowed by a great Fish	815	Christ's Character of John the	
Jonah's Gourd	817	Baptist	878
6. Micah, 7. Nahum	817	The Pharisees' Enmity against	
8. Habakkuk, 9. Zephaniah, 10.		Christ.....	881
Haggai	818	The Parable of the Sower	884
11. Zechariah, 12. Malachi	818	The Wheat and the Tares.....	888
Apocrypha explained	819	The Treasure and the Merchant-	
Conclusion of the Old Testament	819	man	889
THE HISTORY OF THE JEWS, BE-		The Net and the Householder ..	890
TWEEN THE TIMES RECORDED		The Martyrdom of John the Bap-	
IN THE OLD AND NEW TES-		tist	893
TAMENT.....		Christ feeds the Multitude	896
		He walks on the Sea.....	897
		Christ rebukes the Pharisees for	
		teaching Unkindness to Pa-	
		rents	898
		Cures the Daughter of the Syro	
		Phœnician Woman.....	899
THE NEW TESTAMENT.			
St. MATTHEW			
The Generation of Jesus Christ..			
The Birth of the Saviour.....			





	PAGE		PAGE
The Pharisees and Sadducees		Christ cures a deaf Man	975
tempt Christ	901	Blind Man cured at Bethsaida ..	975
Peter's Confession about Christ..	902	THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO LUKE	977
The Transfiguration of Christ...	905	The Birth of John the Baptist ..	977
Christ teaches Humility, Kind-		The Birth and Early Days of Je-	
ness, and Self-denial	908	sus Christ	979
He disputes with the Pharisees.	913	Christ persecuted at Nazareth..	985
Receives little Children.....	913	Christ's Miracle of the Draught	
Converses with a rich young Man	915	of Fishes.....	989
The Parable of the Labourers in		He raises the Widow's Son	993
the Vineyard	917	The Penitent Woman	994
Christ foretels his Sufferings ..	919	The Seventy Disciples sent forth	995
The Petition of Zebedee's Sons..	919	The Inquiring Lawyer	998
The Two Blind Men	920	The Good Samaritan	998
Christ's triumphant Entry into		Martha and Mary	1001
Jerusalem	923	Christ teaches his Disciples to	
He drives the Buyers and Sellers		pray.....	1002
out of the Temple	925	The Parable of the Rich Fool ..	1003
The Parable of the Two Sons ..	928	The Waiting Servants	1004
And of the Husbandmen	929	The Barren Fig-Tree	1007
The Corner-Stone.....	930	The Highest Seat	1008
The Parable of the Marriage		The Lost Piece of Money.....	1008
Supper	931	The Prodigal Son	1008
Conversations of Christ with the		The Unjust Steward	1009
Pharisees.....	933	The Rich Man and Lazarus	1010
Disputes with the Sadducees con-		The Pharisee and Publican	1010
cerning the Resurrection ..	934	Zaccheus, the Publican	1011
Christ's Discourse respecting the		Account of John the Evangelist.	1015
Wickedness of the Pharisees	937	Christ the Lamb of God.....	1019
He foretels the Destruction of Je-		Nathaniel's Character, and Con-	
rusalem	943	jectures about him.....	1020
The Parable of the Ten Virgins	946	Marriage at Cana, in Galilee....	1021
Of the Talents.....	949	Christ's Conversation with Nico-	
The Day of Judgment	950	demus	1025
The Passover	951	The Woman of Samaria.....	1028
The Sufferings of Christ.....	957	The Nobleman's Son Cured	1030
The Agony of our Saviour	957	Christ cures the disabled Man at	
Betrayed by Judas.....	958	the Pool of Bethesda	1031
Denied by Peter	960	Christ compares himself to Bread	1033
The Sufferings of Christ.....	961	Christ the Spring or Fountain of	
His Death	965	Happiness	1035
The Resurrection of Christ.....	969	The Accused Woman	1036
ST. MARK.....	972	Christ gives Sight to a Man born	
Parable of the Sower.....	972	Blind	1037





CONTENTS.

XXI

	PAGE		PAGE
Christ compares himself to a Door.....	1041	Lydia converted	1095
Christ the Good Shepherd	1042	An evil Spirit cast out	1095
He raises Lazarus from the Dead.....	1043	Paul and Silas cast into Pri-son	1096
The Promise of the Holy Spirit.....	1045	And wonderfully released	1097
The Parable of the Vine and Branches	1046	Paul at Athens.....	1099
Christ commits his Mother to the care of John	1048	Paul in the Areopagus	1100
His certain Death from the Soldier piercing his Side	1052	His extensive Travels to preach the Gospel	1105
The Appearances of Christ after his Resurrection	1053	His Miracles at Ephesus	1106
THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES	1056	Account of Ephesus and its Temple	1108
Peter's first Sermon	1061	Paul visits Troas	1115
The Lame Man restored.....	1062	Eutychus falls from a Window in his Sleep.....	1116
The Apostles, Peter and John, taken before the Jewish Sanhedrim	1063	Rhodes, and its Wonderful Statue	1118
Ananias and Sapphira	1064	Paul goes to Jerusalem, and is ill-treated by the Jews	1119
Peter and John thrown into Prison	1067	The Soldiers take him to Cesarea.....	1121
Released by an Angel	1067	Pleads his own Cause before Agrippa	1122
The Death of Stephen	1069	Paul's dangerous Voyage to Rome, and Shipwreck	1124
Saul of Tarsus.....	1069	Lands at Melita	1129
Simon Magus	1070	Paul works Miracles there	1130
Conversion of Saul of Tarsus.....	1072	Paul's Arrival at Rome.....	1131
Saul becomes a Disciple.....	1076	THE EPISTLES	1132
Peter cures Eneas	1077	TO THE ROMANS	1132
Dorcas restored to Life.....	1077	TO THE CORINTHIANS	1136
Cornelius, the Centurion, sends for Peter.....	1078	TO THE GALATIANS	1139
Peter returns to Jerusalem	1080	TO THE EPHESIANS	1139
His Imprisonment and Miraculous Escape	1082	TO THE PHILIPPIANS.....	1141
The Death of Herod	1084	TO THE COLOSSIANS.....	1141
Elymas struck with Blindness ..	1087	TO THE THESSALONIANS	1143
Paul and Barnabas mistaken for Gods	1089	TO TIMOTHY	1144
Disputes at Jerusalem, settled by the Apostles	1090	TO TITUS	1144
Paul and Barnabas separate....	1094	TO PHILEMON	1145
Paul takes young Timothy from Lystra	1094	TO THE HEBREWS	1145
		THE GENERAL EPISTLE OF JAMES.....	1147
		THE EPISTLES GENERAL OF PETER.....	1149
		THE EPISTLES GENERAL OF JOHN.....	1149
		THE GENERAL EPISTLE OF JUDE ..	1150
		THE REVELATION OF ST. JOHN.....	1153





TO THE YOUNG READERS.

DEAR YOUNG FRIENDS,

It would not be possible for us to know who made the world, when it was made, how it was made, and why it was made, had not God told us that he did it; and sent us a book called the Bible; which, besides, tells us about a great many other wonderful things. Nor should we know what would become of us after death, nor have any hope of living with those we love, and who love God, when we have done with this world, had not the Bible told us. This book is very interesting, also; it tells us a great many things about people who lived many thousand years ago; and how God loved them, and kept them, and was angry with them if they did wicked things; and what he did for them that did good things, and feared him, and walked in the way which he commanded. It tells us, too, about great kings, and nations, and battles, and other things, long before any other book can tell us: and, above all, it tells us about Jesus Christ, that good, that kind Saviour, who, when we needed his help, came to save us, sinners against God, from being dreadfully punished for our sins. We have in it an account of his glory, his birth, his life, his death, his rising from the grave, his going to heaven, and his coming again to judge the world. Pray to God to give you a heart to love this book, and read it with care; and God will bless you.

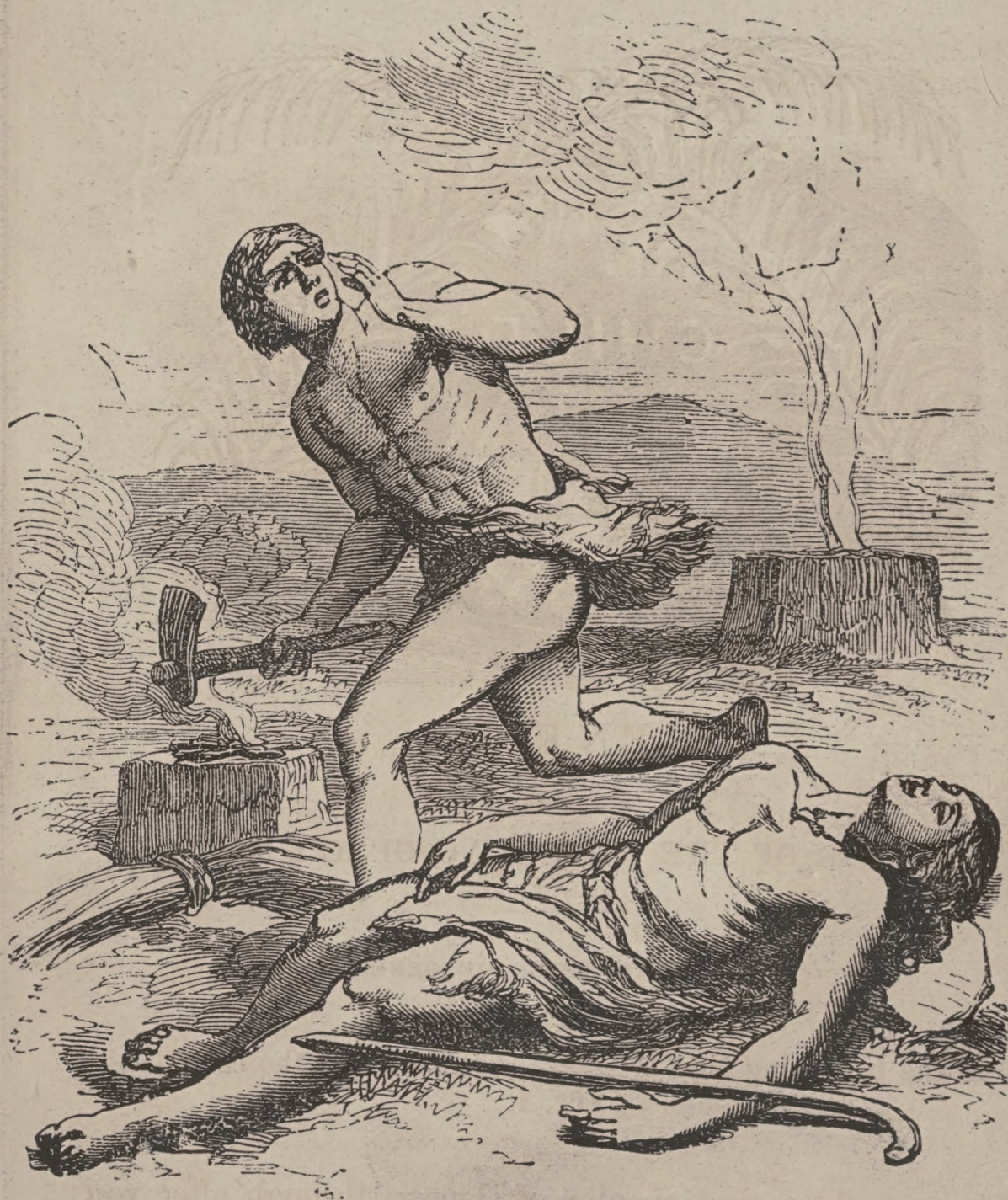
Your affectionate friend,

THE AUTHOR.





ADAM AND EVE IN THE GARDEN OF EDEN.—THE FIRST TEMPTATION AND SIN.



CAIN AND ABEL



THE
CHILD'S
COMMENTATOR

GENESIS,

WHICH MEANS

THE BOOK OF THE BEGINNING OF ALL THINGS.

THE FIRST CHAPTER OF GENESIS.

Creation.

“In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.”—
Ver. 1.

Please read this first chapter of Genesis through after you have read what I am going to say to you about it.

This is a very beautiful world that we live in, and a very great world. It extends much further than we can see, further





indeed than we can think; and there are hills and valleys and plains, there is bright sand, and green grass and great trees, and men and women and children, and birds and beasts and insects live on the dry land, and fishes in the waters.

Now, God made all things, not as you would make a box or a whistle or a doll out of wood or clay or paper, or anything else. He made all things out of nothing by just speaking and commanding them to be; and this first chapter of Genesis tells us just how he did it. Let us look at it a little.

When God first spoke the word which collected together the matter of which our earth was made, the same word created, that is, made out of nothing, this matter. It came together at his call and it was all confusion. Just how it looked we cannot tell, but the water and the sand, the rocks and the clay, the clouds and the vapor or steam were all jumbled together. Possibly this state of things took place more than once, while God was getting this world ready for man to live in.

But it was after one of these times of confusion, that God saw that the world was in just the right condition to make it a home for the being he was going to create, and he proceeded to make it ready for him. With these heavy clouds and the water and mud mixed all together, it was very dark on this great rolling ball, and God first said "Let there be light!" and the light came, but it was a dismal jumble of earth and water that it shone upon. There was no grass, no trees, no houses, and no people. Then God made the light and the darkness each take their turn over the world. The next time God spoke, and the vapor rolled away in the clouds and the water which had mingled with it lay on the earth in pools and broad sheets. He spoke again, and this water drained away from the earth with which it was mixed, and settling down in the deep places, became seas and lakes and rivers, and the dry land appeared.

It was now ready to produce grass and trees and bushes, and these could yield fruits and seeds and leaves for food. So God ordered the grass and trees and herbs to spring up, and they obeyed him at once.

There had been light and darkness all this time, but the light





was that of a cloudy day, when we cannot see what it is that gives us the light ; but now God ordered the clouds to part and the sun to appear, and when it was night, instead of the dark thick clouds which made it so dismal, he made the moon shine out and the stars twinkle in the sky, and so the day and night were divided, and the seasons, following the progress of the sun and the months, the changes of the moon, made the year complete. But so far there was nothing living on the earth. The sun shone, the moon ruled the night, and the trees and fruits and grasses grew, but there was no bird in the air, no fish in the sea, no beast or crawling thing upon the earth. But the time had come for them, and so God spoke and they all began to live and move, the fishes first, the birds next, and then the cattle, and dogs, and wild beasts, and the little worms, the snakes, and everything that it was needful to have on the earth.

But when God had made all these, he had not finished his work. So he made man, different from all the birds and beasts and fishes and creeping things; he made him to stand upon his feet and to have dominion, that is, to rule over all the creatures which he had made. And in making him, God not only spoke, but he breathed into him the breath of life, and man became a living soul. He gave him something which could think and understand and reason ; and he made him master of all the animals, and told him to give them their names.

When He had made man, he put him into a beautiful garden, to take care of it, and though He had not at first made man, male and female, as he had all the animals, yet very soon he put him to sleep, and when he waked God had created a woman from the man's own flesh, and brought her to him to be his mate, and to help him in taking care of the beautiful garden of Eden.

Now, dear children, there are two or three things for you to think of, as you read carefully this wonderful yet true story. One is, how powerful God is, that he could make all things out of nothing, and that he did not have to labor to do this, but he spoke and it was done. Another thing for you to think of is, how good God is, to do all this for the happiness of





man; to make this beautiful world with all its hills and valleys, all its rivers and lakes and seas, with all its green grass, its sweet flowers, its pleasant fruits and its trees for shade and for comfort, all these beasts, and fish, and birds and insects to please us by their beauty and their swiftness, and nourish us by their flesh. And then when he had made all these things to make man to enjoy them and rule over them. And you should remember, also, how wise God is, to know just what would be most for man's happiness and comfort, and to make everything in just the best way. There was nothing of all that he did which could have been done better. Isn't it reasonable and right that man, all men, and boys and girls, too, should love and try to please and obey this great, powerful, good and wise God?

THE SECOND AND THIRD CHAPTERS OF GENESIS.

The Fall of Man.

- "And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, 'Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.'"
- "Hast thou eaten of the tree whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldest not eat?"—Gen. Chap. ii., 16, 17. Chap. iii., 11.

When God put the man and woman whom he had made into the beautiful garden of Eden, he gave them every thing which they needed for their comfort. There were fruits of every kind which would be good for them to nourish them, and which they would love to eat. Their work was very easy, and just enough to make them hungry for their food, and make them sleep quietly; they were always finding something new about the flowers, the trees, or the animals. They had never done anything wrong; they loved the good God who had made





them, and who had given them all these good things, and every day the good angels, and God himself, in a body like the man's, came down, and walked with them in the garden. God had made them perfectly good, without any naughty tempers or any desires, such as you and I, dear children, have sometimes, to do bad things; but he made them free to do right or to do wrong, because there would be no goodness in their doing right, if they could not do wrong.

After all He had done for them, God only gave them one little command to obey. Among the thousands of fruit trees in that great and beautiful garden, there was only one, whose fruit, they were told, they must not eat. This tree was called "the tree of the knowledge of good and evil," and it was in the middle of the garden. It was a very little thing for them to do, to keep from eating that one fruit when all the rest were so good; and you will remember, dear children, that I told you they had not any naughtiness in their hearts, as you and I have, which would lead them to say, "I don't see why I might not have this to eat as well as the rest; it looks better than the others and I know it will taste better; so I *will* eat it." We know how this sort of feeling would come up in our hearts, but Adam and Eve had never had any such thoughts, and it seemed for a good while as if they were always going to be happy and good.

But there was a bad, wicked angel called Satan, who hated God and all good things, and who wanted to make every body as bad and as unhappy as he was. He found out about Adam and Eve, and about the tree in the garden, and he went to work to make them disobey God, by eating this fruit. And this is the way he did it. He came in the form of a serpent or snake—and the serpent was then much prettier and did not crawl on the ground as it does now—and finding the woman alone, began to talk to her about the fruit (I don't think the serpent himself could talk at this time, but the bad angel talked through his mouth, and Eve had seen so many strange things about the animals that she was not frightened to hear him talk). He asked whether they could eat all the fruits, and





the woman told him there was one which they must not eat; if they did they would surely die. The bad angel told her that it was not so; that instead of that, if they ate of this fruit it would make them wise like God; and to show that it was safe, he ate of it, and the woman seeing that it did not hurt him, believed his story, picked the fruit and not only ate it herself, but gave some to her husband.

They had no sooner done this and thus disobeyed God, than they began to feel ashamed and wanted to hide. They went where the trees made the thickest and darkest shade, and they felt in need of clothes, which they had not wanted before; so they fastened the large leaves of the trees together to make a covering for themselves. While they were thus trying to hide themselves, they heard God's voice calling to them, and instead of going as quickly as they could to meet him, as they had always done before, they got further and further into the deep shade. But God still called them, and at last they had to come out, looking sorry enough. When God said to Adam, "Where art thou?" Adam said, "I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself." Then God said, "Who told thee that thou wast naked? Hast thou eaten of the tree whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldest not eat?" This question made them tremble, and the man, still anxious to excuse himself, said, "The woman whom thou gavest to be with me she gave me of the tree, and I did eat." Then God said to the woman, "What is this that thou hast done?" And the woman said, "The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat." This was the way that SIN came into the world. So long as Adam and Eve obeyed God and did what he had told them to do, they were happy and there was no sin in the world, for there were no other people but this man and woman then living in the world. But when they disobeyed God's command, although it seemed to be a little thing, it changed their whole nature. Before, they liked to see God and to talk with him. Now they did not want to see him, and they hid themselves. Before, they were so innocent and pure that they did not need to wear clothes in that beautiful garden; but now they felt





that their hearts were so bad, that they wanted to cover themselves up with clothing. It was only a little thing they had done, but there was the seed of greater things in it. If they could, merely to gratify their taste, disobey the only command God had given them, they would be likely to go on to worse things, and thinking that they were as wise as God, they would want to rule in his place.

So it was right that God should punish them for this naughty act of disobedience. They could not put themselves back where they were before, for they had broken God's law, and even if they should never do it again, this once had brought death upon them; but having begun to disobey, God knew that they would do so again.

Now then came their punishment. God had seen and known what they had done, and they had had to own that they had disobeyed his command, so they knew that God must and would keep his word and punish them. God first told the serpent, through whom the bad angel had led the man and woman to sin, what was to be done with him. He had been very handsome, and had gone about on four feet; but after this he was to crawl on the ground, and eat dust, and to be hated by everybody and to hate them in turn. Men were to crush his head, and he was to bite at their heels. The bad angel who had used him for this business did not belong to this world, and so God did not punish him at this time, but kept him for worse punishment hereafter.

Then God told the woman that she, who had been so happy before, should have a great deal of trouble; that she should often be sick and sad; and that her husband should rule over her. The frequent sickness was to be a part of that death which was to come upon her for eating the fruit; and since she had been the first to eat and had given it to her husband it was right that she should be punished first.

But the man had his full share of the punishment, too, as he deserved; the garden had yielded fruit to him without labor, but he and the woman must now go away from that pleasant garden, and wherever they might go, they would find no other





place where they could live without hard work, work which would make them sweat. When he dug up the ground and planted fruit trees or other things to grow for food, the thorns and weeds and briers would spring up and he would have hard work to get rid of them. He, too, was to have sickness and sorrow and trouble all the days of his life, and by and by he was to die, and his body, which at first had been made out of the dust, was to crumble into dust again.

But God was very good to this man and woman, though they had been so naughty. He must keep his word, and so they must have sickness and begin to die from that day; and they could not live any longer in that beautiful garden; but he gave them work to do, which was much better than to have let them be idle; he gave them the skins of beasts for clothes, which were much better than those great leaves which they had tried to wrap themselves up in; and what was better than all the rest, he let them know that by and by his dear Son, who had created them and loved them, would come to this world and die for them, and so they might be pardoned and their souls—the part in man that thinks and feels, that obeys or disobeys, that loves or hates—should be taken to a better place than this garden of Eden—to Heaven, where they could be happy forever. Was not this good in God, when they had been so naughty, to thus fix a way in which they could be forgiven and be happy forever?

THE FOURTH CHAPTER OF GENESIS.

The First Murder.

“And Cain talked with Abel his brother: and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother, and slew him.”—Verse 8.

It was a sad thing for Adam and Eve that they disobeyed God in the garden of Eden. They were not only driven out of





Eden for it and made to work hard and sorrowfully for their food and clothes; but they had other troubles which were a great deal worse than these. Before this, they loved God, and there was nothing in their hearts to lead them to do anything which they knew he would not like; but now there was in their hearts constantly a wish to do something which would offend God. Their hearts were like a glass of clear water into which somebody has poured a spoonful of ink, and it is now no longer clear, but black all through; Adam and Eve were very sorry for this, and offered sacrifices for their sins, as God had showed them how; that is, they killed a young lamb, and put it with its fat upon a pile of stones and burned it for an offering to God. This was to show that they trusted in God's word and believed that he would send his Son as he had told them, to be killed and offered as a sacrifice, as this little lamb had been, to atone for their sins. God accepted this sacrifice and forgave the sins of Adam and Eve, because they sought it for the sake of his Son who was to come.

But the worst thing about their sin was, that all their children and grandchildren and all the children who have been born into the world since that time have inherited from them, these sinful hearts, so that they want to do wrong things from the time they can talk and go alone. I do not think that Adam and Eve knew this when their first children were born, but, by and by, they found out that it was so, and this was one of their many troubles.

They had two sons at first and some daughters. When these sons grew up, the older one, Cain, became a tiller of the ground, or, as we should say, a farmer; he dug up the ground, and planted fruit trees, and vines, and grain, and gathered and stored them for food. Abel the younger brother, kept sheep and probably goats also. When the right time of the year came around, the two brothers went to offer sacrifices to God. Abel did as his father and mother had taught him, and brought young lambs for sacrifice, to show that he believed that the Son of God was to be offered as a sacrifice for sin; but Cain, though he had been taught the same things, did not believe





them, but simply offered some fruit and grain as a token that he thought God was his master, and that he ought to pay him his taxes.

In what way God showed that he was pleased with Abel's offering and that he was not pleased with Cain's, we do not know, but it was in such a way, that both of them understood it, and Cain was very angry and sulky. God spoke to Cain about this—for though men had sinned, yet God kept watching over them, and using all means to lead them to do right—but Cain was still sulky and angry, and pretty soon, he talked with Abel, and when they were in the field together, he struck his brother and killed him. When a child or a grown-up person does one naughty or bad thing, they are very apt to do other things equally bad to cover up the first. It was so with Cain. He did not bring the right offering, although he knew better; then when it was not accepted, he got angry, and when he was reproved, he was sulky; next, he went away with his brother and killed him; then when God asked him where his brother was, he thought he could deceive God, and pretend that he did not know. But God did know, and he punished Cain by making him a fugitive and a vagabond on the earth, and forbidding the earth to yield to him the fruits and grains it did to others. Cain was a very unhappy man after this, but he was also a very bad man. He went away from his father and mother, and built a strong walled fort or town, so that men need not kill him, and his children and grandchildren were very bad, although they made a great many things which were very useful to men. Some of them made tents and kept cattle, others made musical instruments—little pipes on which they could blow, or instruments with strings on which they could play with their fingers—and one of them, whose name was Tubal-Cain, found out how to work iron and copper, and how to melt them out of the ores. These were very good things to find out; but with all their knowledge they did not know much about God, and they did not love or serve him.





THE FIFTH CHAPTER OF GENESIS.

About the oldest men who ever lived in the world.

“And all the days of Methuselah were nine hundred sixty and nine years, and he died.”—Verse 27.

Adam and Eve had other children after the wicked Cain killed his brother Abel; and one of these, whose name was Seth, became a good man and his children and grandchildren were also good, and loved and served God, while those who were descended from Cain were wicked, and fought and quarrelled with each other, and liked to do what they knew would not please God. There were at this time so few people on the earth that God let them live a great while before death, which came at last for every one, took them away. And as each one of them had many children, the people began after a while to be more plenty. Adam lived to be nine hundred and thirty years old (about nine times as old as the oldest men now); Seth was nine hundred and twelve; Enos, Adam's grandson, nine hundred and five; Cainan, his great grandson, nine hundred and ten; while Jared, Cainan's grandson, was nine hundred and sixty-two, when he died, and his grandson, Methuselah, was nine hundred and sixty-nine, and so was the oldest man that ever lived in the world. But though some and perhaps all of those we have named were good men, the greater part of the people who lived to be very old were not good, and the longer they lived, the more they sinned, and the worse they made the world. After a time some of these people who belonged to Seth's family married some of the descendants of Cain, and as these grew more and more wicked they very soon made the world so bad that it did not seem to be God's world any more. God was greatly displeased with the badness of men, and with their determination to sin against him all the time, and he sent some of the few good men that were left on the earth and among others Enoch, the father of Methuselah, to talk to the people and try to persuade them to be better and to do





THE DELUGE.





THE RETURN OF THE DOVE TO THE ARK.



BUILDING THE TOWER OF BABEL.



what was right; but they did not listen to his talk, and were so bad and said such wicked things, that Enoch was very much grieved. But he loved God so much, and was so sick of this bad world, that God did not let him stay in it, but took him home to Heaven without dying. We sometimes wonder, nowadays, when God takes very good people away from this world, and think it is very hard that we must part with them; but God takes them away in love, because they are better fitted to enjoy Heaven, and be with him, than those who are left.

THE SIXTH, SEVENTH, EIGHTH, NINTH, AND TENTH CHAPTERS OF
GENESIS.

The Flood.

“And every living substance was destroyed which was upon the face of the ground, both man, and cattle, and the creeping things, and the fowls of the heaven; and they were destroyed from the earth: and Noah only remained alive, and they that were with him in the ark.”—Chap. vii. 23.

Men grew worse and worse, so that they were wicked every where. “And there were giants in the earth in those days.” This means, some very huge, tall men, and also some men of great name, like kings; and they were at the same time tyrants, that is, very cruel.

And God, who sees everything, “saw the wickedness of man.” “And the Lord said, I will destroy man, whom I have created, from the face of the earth; both man, and beast, and the creeping thing, and the fowls of the air; for it repenteth me that I have made them.” He that made them had a right to destroy them, if they did not do well after they were made; for it was for this they were created. And as they used their beasts to work their wicked works, these, too, also perished.

But there were yet a few good men left; among them was NOAH. It is said, he was “a just man and perfect;” which means, he was a good man; for no man could be quite perfect





after Adam fell, because all his children became sinful like him. And "Noah walked with God." "What! did he walk with him as we do with one another?" No, not so. This means, that wherever he went, he always thought upon God; so that, while all the wicked world thought nothing about him, Noah thought as much as if he had him by his side; and, indeed, God is everywhere, though bad men do not think it.

Well: God would not let the good Noah perish with the bad world; so he told him how he might escape. "What! did God talk with Noah, then? How does God talk?" I will tell you. God does not speak with a voice as we do, but he has a great many ways in which he can make people hear him; and, perhaps, he might show Noah in a dream, or impress it upon Noah's mind, that he would drown the world. We know, however, that he who made Noah could easily tell him how he would save him. So he, being taught in some way to do it, built a huge ark, something like a ship without sails: and, being of wood, it could swim upon the water. And he made different rooms in it, and he put pitch inside and out, to keep out the rain.

And at length he went into the ark, with his wife, and his sons, and their wives; and God caused some of every living thing to go into the ark. "And all the fountains of the great deep were broken up;" that is, the springs out of which water is pumped, rushed up on the earth: and perhaps the sea overflowed, and all the rivers in the world, "and the windows of heaven were opened."

"What! are there windows in heaven, then?" No, my dear: this is a way of speaking,—meaning only that God opened the clouds as we would a window, and that he poured out his rain upon the earth in great torrents.

This flood was sufficient to destroy all the men, women and children which were then living, except Noah and his family; whether it extended to this continent, we do not know, and it makes no difference, since there were then no people here; but all the nations of men, who have any history, have some account of this flood, though some of them in their traditions, have mixed other stories with it. All agree, that only one family was saved.

Well, at last the flood ceased, after it had rained upon the earth





forty days and forty nights; and Noah remained a whole year in the ark, till he could come out upon dry land, and all the waters had sunk into the earth and dried up.

From that time God gave a sign that he would never more destroy the earth by water. That sign was the rainbow. Not that the rainbow did not before exist, for no doubt it did; but from that time, whenever we looked on the rainbow, we were to remember what God had said to Noah.

But there are many other things, which I have no room to tell you, about the dreadful destruction which the waters made; the ark resting upon a high mountain called Ararat: and Noah sending out a raven, and then a dove, to see if the earth was dry, and if they could get any resting-place; and how he built an altar and returned thanks to God for saving him, as we ought always to do when we escape from danger; and how God blessed him. All the people in the world are descended from one or other of Noah's sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth. Most Europeans and Americans are sons of Japheth; the Jews, Arabs, etc., are the children of Shem; the Egyptians, etc., of Ham.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER OF GENESIS.

The Building of Babel, and Beginning of many Languages.

"And they said, Go to (or, Come,) let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven (that is, be very high); and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth."—Ver. 4.

For more than seventeen hundred years everybody in the world spoke one language, supposed to have been Hebrew, such as the Jews speak; and there must have been a great many people in the world. But a man, supposed to have been Nimrod, named in chapter x. and verse 8 and 9, is thought to have wished to be king over them all. Therefore, under a pretence that they would be more happy by living all together than by spreading abroad over the earth which God had made for them, and would





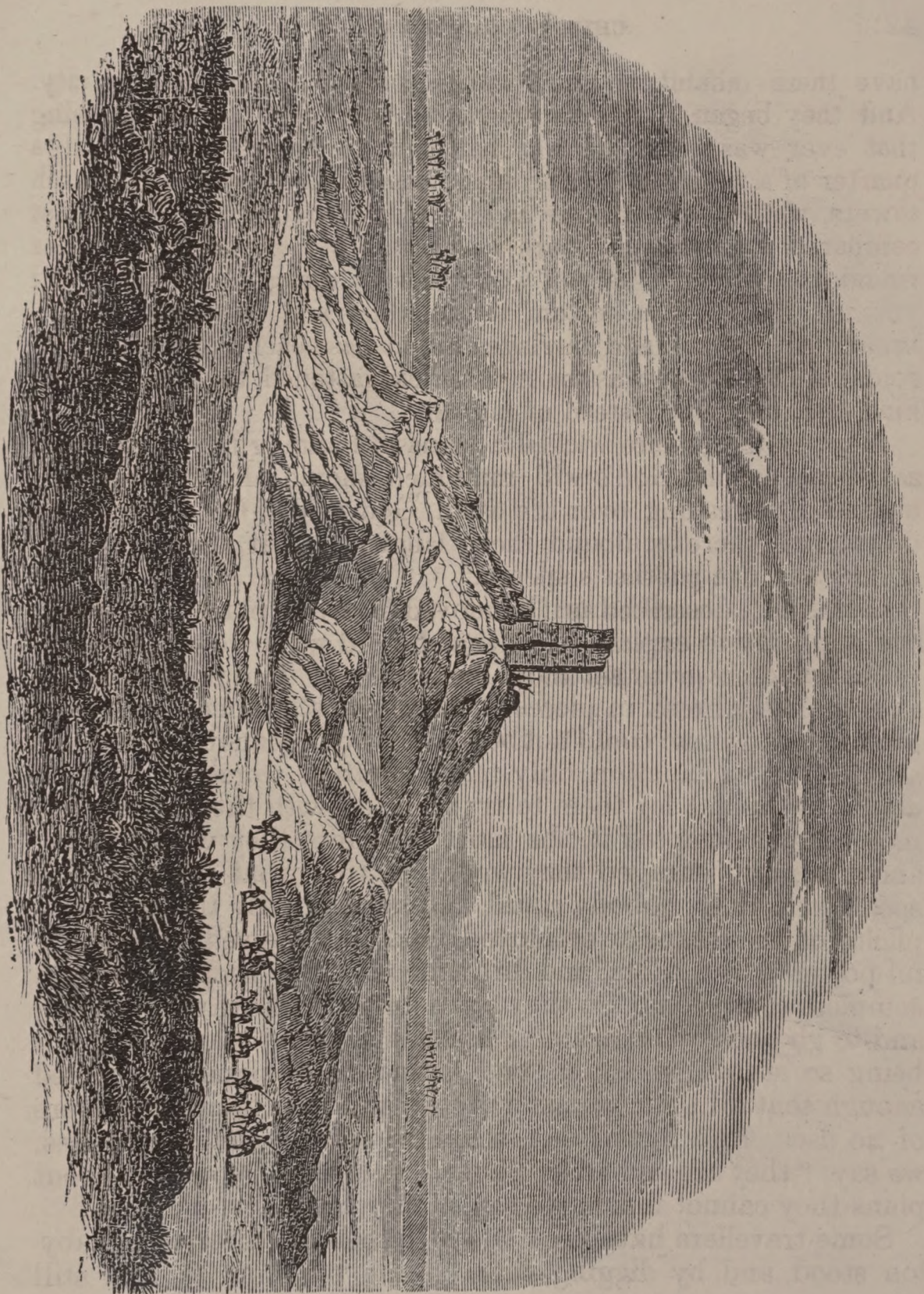
have them inhabit, he got them to consent to build a fine city. And they began a tower, which was the most wonderful thing that ever was seen. It was half a mile round it, and half a quarter of a mile high! The shape was square, like many church towers, which, however, are as small, compared with it, as a post compared with them. There was a walk to ascend by degrees round and round it, as you would wind a string upon a stick till you got it from the bottom to the top; and this walk was so broad, that horses and carriages might pass each other and turn round. This tower was built of brick, fastened together with a kind of hard pitch, instead of mortar.

Now, as there were wicked designs in building this tower, and as it was against God's will that men should all live together, instead of spreading over the earth, God said, "Go to, let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech."

God is here described as if he moved from one place to another; but it is only to explain to us that he did what we would do, if we had had power to set about such a thing. And nothing could so completely break in pieces all their plans. Where the words spoken by one man could not be understood by another, and any attempt at explanation only made matters worse, it was, of course, of no use for them to try to go on with their work; the more they attempted it, the more blunders they would make, and the more enraged they would be, that what they tried to speak so plainly, nobody could understand. By the very simplicity of the means he employed, God thus showed his wonderful power and wisdom, and brought all their wicked plans to complete confusion. So they were forced to leave off building, and to go and live separately; perhaps angry at one another for being so stupid as not to understand their signs, and vexed enough that all their labour was lost, and that their plans were of no use. And to this day, when we talk of confused noises, we say, "they are as bad as Babel;" and when people set about plans they cannot finish, we say, "they are Babel-builders."

Some travellers have been where Babel and afterward Babylon stood, and by digging, found some part of its wall still





THE BIRS-NIMRUD.—Supposed by some to be the Tower of Babel.



LOT'S WIFE.



standing, for it was very strong; and it is built of bricks and hard pitch, or slime, as the Scripture says; so true is everything it relates.

This account of the Babel-builders shows that whatever wicked men may think, say, or do, God will do as he pleases: for he is more mighty than they,—he is God Almighty.

Xerxes, a great king of Persia, destroyed this tower: and a long time afterwards, Alexander, a great Grecian king, tried to build it again. It took ten thousand men two months to clear away the fallen rubbish, and then they had not done: when Alexander died, and his plan was given over.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER OF GENESIS.

Abram.

“Now the Lord had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father’s house, unto a land that I will shew thee:

“And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great: and thou shalt be a blessing:

“And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee; and in thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed.”—Ver. 1—3.

You read a great deal about Abram in the Bible. His father’s name was Terah, and his family was of the race that sprung from Shem, one of the sons of Noah.

Abram lived in a place called Ur, in the country of the Chaldeans; but the people were wicked, and good people must not live with bad people, because they get harm by it: bad people lead them to do bad things, and their hearts are sad afterwards at what they have done.

So God “said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father’s house, unto a land that I will shew thee:





“And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing:

“And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed.”

Now, God designed by this to keep a people in the world to show forth his praise; and, thank God! all are not wicked people, but he still has many in the world who love and serve him.

How God spoke to Abram we cannot tell; but we know that God can do all things, and he who made the world could very easily make any one in the world to know what he wished him to do. He now speaks to us in his word; but then he often spoke to good men in dreams, and by other like means, and he might so speak to Abram.

What God said to Abram was very kind and gracious. Oh, he is a good God to them that love him: they are always well off for it in the end! He told him that he would bless him, and that he would make him a blessing. He would bless him by doing him good; and so he did, and so he does to all good men: and he would make him a blessing, by causing him to do good to others.

Abram minded what God said to him. He left his country, and he took with him those that would go of his family—his wife Sarai, and his nephew Lot. “And they went forth to go into the land of Canaan; and into the land of Canaan they came.”

This was a country then full of wicked men; but Abram did not go to live amongst them as he did in his native country. “The Canaanite was then in the land.” The Canaanites displeased God very much by their sins, and their land was in time to be taken from them because of their sins; and then Abram's family would have it, and they would know what good was to be got by having so good a father, whom God had blessed and made a blessing to them.

As soon as Abram got into Canaan, “there was a famine,” or want of food in the land. The crops of corn and fruit had failed, and people were starving. This must have made Abram think whether he had done right or not in leaving his country, and





whether God would really bless him as he had said. But Abram had great faith: he was sure that all God says is right and true. So Abram would not go back; and he went for a time into the next country, which was Egypt, and where there was corn.

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER OF GENESIS.

Lot.

“And Abram said unto Lot, Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between me and thee, and between my herdmen and thy herdmen; for we be brethren.

“Is not the whole land before thee? Separate thyself, I pray thee, from me: if thou wilt take the left hand, then I will go to the right; or if thou depart to the right hand, then I will go to the left.”—Ver. 8, 9.

The riches of people in those days were mostly in cattle, of which they had great numbers. “And Abram was very rich in cattle, in silver, and in gold.”—And Lot also, which went with Abram, had flocks, and herds, and tents. And the land was not able to bear them,” (that is, it was not large enough just in that part,) “that they might dwell together. And there was a strife between the herdmen of Abraham’s cattle, and the herdmen of Lot’s cattle.”

In that country water was not always to be got at, as it is here, and wells were dug with great pains to find water. To those wells the cattle were driven, and water was drawn and given them to drink. If two parties got to a well at the same time, they often quarrelled who should get the water first, or who only should have it. This was most likely the case with Lot’s and Abram’s servants; but they were wrong to quarrel, and by so doing they made Lot and Abram leave one another, when they might still have lived together in love and peace; for the land would have been large enough if they had been kind to each other. There are very many children and young persons now, who, by their fear lest somebody is going to take away some





thing which belongs to them, or to those who employ them, are constantly stirring up quarrels, and by their angry passions, their tale-bearing and their wrong stories, keep up a perpetual strife with those around them. This is very wicked.

But, my dear young reader, perhaps you now do the same thing in another way, and quarrel with your playfellow about your toys, and snatch them from him, and will not let him play with them or even look at them, or, if he happen to break them, you are in a rage and fury : this is all wrong, and is the same spirit that these naughty servants showed. Pray to God to give you a better.

And now Abram showed how good a man he was. As Lot and he must part, he gave Lot his choice. He was willing to do anything for the sake of peace : and he told him, if he would go to the country on the left hand, then he would go to the right ; or if he went to the right hand, then he would go to the left.

How much was this unlike those children who are pleased with nothing ; and if they are offered one thing, want another, and fling and show their airs if they cannot get it. If this spirit remain with them till they are men, they will always be quarrelling, and by their obstinacy will be disliked by everybody.

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER OF GENESIS.

Battle of the Kings, and Lot taken Prisoner.

“And there went out the king of Sodom, and the king of Gomorrah, and the king of Admah, and the king of Zeboiim, and the king of Bela (the same is Zoar) ; and they joined battle with them in the vale of Siddim ;

“With Chedorlaomer, the king of Elam, and with Tidal king of nations, and Amraphel king of Shinar, and Arioch king of Ellasar ; four kings with five.

“And the vale of Siddim was full of slime pits ; and the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah fled, and fell there ; and they that remained fled to the mountain.

“And they took all the goods of Sodom and Gomorrah, and all their victuals, and went their way.





“And they took Lot, Abram’s brother’s son, who dwelt in Sodom, and his goods, and departed.”—Ver. 8—12.

We have here an account of the first war that we read of in Scripture. It is a very shocking thing, that men cannot live in the world without quarrelling and killing each other ; and it is a breaking of God’s command, “Thou shalt do no murder.” And though children do not kill each other, yet they often fight and hurt one another in a passion about trifles.

Chedorlaomer was king of Persia, which was in old times called Elam. He was not content with what he had, but had probably beaten five other kings not so strong as he, and had made them pay him some money and goods every year, to keep their crowns. After he had done so for twelve years, they thought they were strong enough to beat him, and so they would pay the money and goods no longer. The king of Elam, or Persia, did not like to lose their tribute, or what they paid him ; and he got the king of Shinar, or Chaldea, and two other kings, to join him, and go and beat and regain these people. They met in a plain, or large piece of flat ground, and there they fought. The king of Elam, or Persia, conquered or beat them, and they all ran away. Among those that were beaten, was the king of Sodom, and his city was entered, and all that was worth having was taken away ; and Lot, having gone to live there, lost all that he had, and was carried off to be made a slave of with all his family.

A wretched condition poor Lot was in now ! This came from choosing to go and live among people that did not fear God, and that, as we shall soon learn, were noted for being wicked.

One of the people of Sodom escaped, and made haste to Abram, and told him of what had become of Lot. Abram pitied his poor nephew, and resolved to save him. So he took all his men, three hundred and eighteen in number, and divided them into several parts, that he might come upon the enemy on all sides ; and overtaking them at night, he took them by surprise—that is, when they did not expect it—and beat them in turn, and brought back Lot, “and his goods, and the women also, and the people.”





And now the king of Sodom, hearing of what Abram had done, went to see if he could get back any of his people. You will see in the chapter, that the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah fled, and fell into the slime pits, or pits full of a kind of black mud,—and probably were smothered there; so that this was either a new king of Sodom, or it was only his people that fell into the pits, and he escaped. Abram very kindly gave back all he had got, and would have nothing for what he had done. He was too good a man to wish to get rich by war; and he restored everything to the lawful owners, lest he should break God's law, which says, "Thou shalt not steal," and "Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's goods." It is a sad thing, that even little children have been known to take away, by force, from others, things which were not their own, because they were stronger than they. This is wicked; and children who do so, if they do not grow better, will do far worse things when they are men.

THE NINETEENTH CHAPTER OF GENESIS.

The Burning of Sodom and Gomorrah.

- "Then the Lord rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the Lord out of heaven;
"And he overthrew those cities, and all the plain, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and that which grew upon the ground."
—Ver. 24, 25.

Sodom was now become so very wicked a place, that God said he would destroy it at once, and he told Abraham what he meant to do. Now Abraham did not know it was so very wicked a place as it was; and as we should always think as kindly as we can of everybody, Abraham hoped there might be some good people there besides Lot, for whose sake God would spare the wicked cities. In the eighteenth chap. of Genesis, and at the twenty-third and following verses, we have a very fine prayer which Abraham prayed to God, to try and save Sodom and Gomorrah; for we have said that Abraham was a good man, and good men always





pray. He said, "Peradventure (or if) there be fifty righteous in the city: wilt thou also destroy and not spare the place for the fifty righteous that are therein? That be far from thee to do after this manner, to slay the righteous with the wicked, that be far from thee: shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" And the Lord said, "If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare all the place for their sakes."

See how God loves good people; so much, that if there had only been fifty in Sodom and Gomorrah, he would have spared all the wicked for their sakes. And see what blessings we may hope for, if we live among truly good people, who love and fear God.

But Abraham was afraid that there might not be fifty, for he no doubt knew that the cities were very wicked; and he therefore prayed God to save Sodom, if the number of good people should be less than fifty, till at last he left off at ten; and the Lord said, "I will not destroy it for ten's sake."

Some angel had appeared to Abraham, and talked with him on this subject. An angel means a messenger, or a person that carries a message. Angels are often spoken of in Scripture, for, in those days, God made known his mind to men by sending angels. These are spirits that serve God in heaven, and they often, by his power, put on the shape of men, and so talked with them.

Now two angels went to see the state of Sodom and Gomorrah, and to destroy them for their sins. In the Eastern parts of the world, people may now be found that are very hospitable, that is, kind to strangers, and ready to give them something to eat and drink, when they are very tired after a journey. In those days there was much hospitality. Lot was sitting out of doors, enjoying the air, as they do in hot countries; and as he was at the gate or entrance of the city, he saw two men that looked like travellers, and he bowed to them to show them respect, and kindly asked them into his house, and begged them to stop all night and to wash their feet, and then they could go on comfortably in the morning.

In some of the hot countries the people do not wear shoes, but what are called sandals, or soles with straps to them, that go over





the top of the foot to keep them on. These were used by people at that time, and after a journey it was very comfortable to wash the feet to make them clean and cool. This will explain the reason why Lot asked the travellers to wash their feet.

The travellers now went in with Lot, and he made them a feast, that is, gave them to eat; and his food was very plain, according to the custom of those times, and the countries in those parts: all they had was a little unleavened bread, or bread made without yeast, which ours is made with that it may be light.

And now the men of the city wanted to become acquainted with the strangers, and to make them as wicked as themselves, by getting them to join their society; but Lot went to them, and opposed them, and they would have done him harm, "but the men put forth their hands and pulled Lot into the house to them, and shut to the door. And they smote the men that were at the door of the house with blindness, both small and great: so that they wearied themselves to find the door."

The angels, seeing what a wicked race of men these were, now warned Lot to get all his family together and escape, before God destroyed them. Lot had a wife, and two daughters who lived with him; some also were married, but their husbands would not believe Lot's warning, and he was obliged to leave them and their husbands behind; if they had been good people, they would not have perished with such a punishment. And in the morning, the angels turned away, for he lingered, perhaps in hopes of seeing his other children coming, and they said, "Escape for thy life; look not behind thee, neither stay thou in all the plain: escape to the mountains, lest thou be consumed." But Lot begged that he might go to Zoar, a little city close by; and for his sake that city was saved.

And now the storm began. "Then the Lord rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the Lord out of heaven. And he overthrew those cities, and all the plain, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and that which grew upon the ground."

Some persons, who wrote a long while ago, tell us there were thirteen cities in the plain of Sodom, and that Sodom was the





capital, or largest, as London is of England. These all perished but Zoar, where Lot was.

In a storm of thunder and lightning, there is often a smell of brimstone; but this was more than a common storm. God Almighty can do any thing; but, in destroying these places, he perhaps made use of some means already at hand, without making new ones. There are two cities in the country called Italy, which were entirely destroyed by the volcano, or burning mountain, Vesuvius; and the burning and red-hot stuff which it spouted out, passed some miles in the air, and fell upon one of them and quite smothered it; the other was smothered by the streams of fire that ran from the mountain along the ground like melted lead. In the same way, a volcano burst up through the ground in the middle of the plain of Jorullo in Mexico, and the burning hot lava flowed along the ground and set everything on fire. Just so it may have been with these cities of the plain; the pitch or bitumen which was so plenty there would soon burn when the fire touched it, and so all the cities and their people were burned, and their plain sank down and was covered with the waters. The whole country bordering on the plain became dry and barren. A part of this plain it is sup-





posed is the lower end of the Dead Sea, which is very salt and bitter, and has a great deal of sulphur and slime on its shores. The valley in which the sea is, is very low, hot, and unhealthy.

In this dreadful judgment Lot lost his wife. She did not like to leave Sodom. Perhaps she thought of her daughters behind, or wanted to save her goods, or more likely did not quite believe that God was going to burn the place; and so she stood and looked, and the fiery rain fell upon her, and she was killed as she stood: and being covered over with what fell, as people are covered over in a fall of snow, she became a pillar of salt, or salt sulphur!

When Abraham rose in the morning, he went to a place whence he could see where Sodom and Gomorrah had stood; "and, lo, the smoke of the country went up as the smoke of a furnace."

Here, my dear young reader, you see what an evil and a bitter thing it is to sin against God, and what a fearful thing it is to fall into the hands of the living God. This was a terrible fire; but "the earth and all the works that are in it," will by and by be burned up, on account of the wickedness which is in the world. God spares it for a while, because there are praying people in it, like Lot; but then its end shall come; and all wicked men, women, and children, and—particularly remember—all liars, shall have their part in "the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone," which, because of its many horrors, is the name God Almighty gives to the place reserved for the wicked. Pray, then, to God, that he would save you from this dreadful place, as Lot was saved from burning Sodom, "the Lord being merciful unto him."

THE TWENTY-FIRST CHAPTER OF GENESIS.

Hagar and Ishmael.

'And God heard the voice of the lad: and the angel of God called to Hagar out of heaven, and said unto her, What aileth thee, Hagar? fear not; for God hath heard the voice of the lad where he is."—Ver. 17.





Besides Sarah, his first wife, Abraham married his maid, named Hagar, who was an Egyptian woman. Several of the Patriarchs, or good men of that period of the world, had more wives than one; though it is not now allowed, since Jesus Christ said that no man should have more than one wife.

Hagar had a son named Ishmael, and Sarah had a son named Isaac. Ishmael was fourteen years older than Isaac, and big enough to know better, but he "mocked" his little brother Isaac, and teased him, when they were probably at play together. Now this was not behaving like a good brother; it was very rude, and especially mean, in an elder brother so to treat one so much younger than himself; and it was very likely that such behaviour would end in mischief; for mocking is almost sure to lead to quarrelling, and often to something worse. I will tell you what the Reverend Matthew Henry, a good minister who lived many years ago, says about this affair; and I hope you will remember it:—"Ishmael was fourteen years older than Isaac; and when children are together, the elder should be careful and tender of the younger; but it argued a very base and sordid disposition in Ishmael, to be abusive to a child that was no way a match for him."

Sarah loved her own son Isaac, and could not bear that he should be so treated by his elder brother; and though she had told Abraham to marry Hagar, she did not like her, and this behaviour of her son so vexed her that she begged Abraham to turn both Hagar and Ishmael out of doors. Perhaps Hagar had not brought up Ishmael to behave like a good boy, and this made Sarah the more angry. It is a great blessing to have parents who teach us to love God, and to love one another. Abraham loved both his children: "and the thing was very grievous in Abraham's sight:"—he was grieved that his children should quarrel, and grieved that Sarah should ask him to punish Hagar and Ishmael so severely. "Children ought to consider," says good Mr. Henry again, "that the more their parents love them, the more they are grieved at their miscarriages"—that is, their bad behaviour—"and particularly their quarrels among themselves."

But God determined that these children should be the heads of





great nations, and in his wise providence he caused this affair to bring about what he intended should take place. "And God said unto Abraham, Let it not be grievous in thy sight." So then God saw Ishmael mocking Isaac. "God," says Mr. Henry once more "takes notice what children do in their play, and will reckon with them if they say or do amiss, though their parents do not."

And so the end of all this was, that Ishmael was turned out of doors for his bad behaviour, and his mother too, for not teaching him better.

And now, from the fourteenth to the nineteenth verses of the chapter, you have a very wonderful account of God's kindness to Hagar and Ishmael, when they were cast out. Abraham gave Hagar some bread, and a bottle of water, and sent her and her son away. And she wandered about in the wilderness, or wild country; and when the water was all drank, and they were fainting with thirst and fatigue, she cast her son under one of the shrubs; and she sat down at a little distance and wept. And the poor boy cried aloud; "And God heard the voice of the lad; and the angel of God called to Hagar out of heaven, and said unto her, What aileth thee, Hagar? fear not, for God hath heard the voice of the lad where he is. And God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water; and she went and filled the bottle with water, and gave the lad drink." Perhaps her eyes were swollen with crying, and she could scarcely see; but now she dried her tears, and looked around, and lo! there was a well which she had not seen before, and she and her son did not perish with thirst.

My dear young friend, wherever we are, there is a good God that looks down upon us. If even our friends forsake us, let us never forget to trust in God. Perhaps when Hagar "lifted up her voice, and wept," she also prayed—and so, perhaps, did Ishmael; for they must have learnt so to do in the dwelling of pious Abraham. And God was there, to hear their prayers and their cries, and to see their tears. Let this comfort you when you are in sorrow, and teach you to pray to God for his help. He will then surely bless you, and do you good.

Note 1.—You must have seen that we first spelt the name of Isaac's father ABRAM, and then ABRAHAM, for God altered his name. About this you read in the 17th chapter, and





HAGAR AND ISHMAEL.

ISAAC MEETING REBEKAH.





THE TWENTY-SECOND CHAPTER OF GENESIS.

Abraham offering up his Son Isaac.

"And it came to pass after these things that God did tempt Abraham, and said unto him, Abraham! and he said, Behold, here I am.

"And he said, Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt-offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of.

"And Abraham rose up early in the morning, and saddled his ass, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son, and clave the wood for the burnt-offering, and rose up, and went unto the place of which God had told him."—Vers. 1, 2, 3.

This is a very affecting story, indeed. You may read the whole of it in this chapter, ending with the nineteenth verse.

Abraham had long wished to have a son when Isaac was born, and he was called by the name Isaac, which means *Laughter*, to show how glad the good old man and his aged wife were, to have a son to comfort them in their old age, and whom they could both love.

But perhaps they thought of Isaac more than of God; and it they did so, they did that which was very wrong, for we ought to love God above all persons or things in the world. Though fathers and mothers should love their children, and children should love their parents, and brothers, and sisters, and one another, yet God must be loved better than all.

Abraham and Sarah, no doubt, knew all this, and they did

4th and following verses. Abraham means "*the father of a great multitude*;" and from Abraham came all the Jews, who long served God; and all good men, as they are like Abraham, believe in God, and are called Abraham's seed, or children.

Note 2.—You must also have seen that we first spelt the name of Isaac's mother SARAI, and then SARAH; for in the 17th chap. of Genesis, and 15th and following verses, we learn that God changed her name. Sarai means "*my princess*," but Sarah, "*a princess*;" for when God made her the mother of Isaac, she was to be the mother, or *princess* of many nations, that should be born of her race; and especially in her family, in course of time, was to be born Jesus Christ, "*the Prince of Peace*."





love God ; but still there might be a danger of their loving Isaac so as to give him a share of love that did not belong to him, but to God only.

Now God is jealous of us, if he loves us, and he will have us love him. When we say God is jealous, we do not mean as we are of one another, because that is a very ugly thing in us ; but we mean that he is very watchful to see that we do nothing to show him we do not love him better than all creatures ; and he deserves our love, for he is better to us than all creatures are.

Perhaps, therefore, to put Abraham to the trial, and to show how far he would go in his love, as well as what real love to God can do, "God did tempt Abraham."

To *tempt*, among us, means to entice one another to do anything, and very often to do a wrong thing : but here it means only to *try*. God did try Abraham, to prove how much he loved him ; and as he had obeyed him in leaving his country and kindred when he told him he would still show what more he would do ; and knowing that the old man was sincere, he would hold him up for a pattern of faith and love to all good people in time to come.

But what was this trial ? God spake to Abraham, and said, "Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah ;" and offer him there for a burnt-offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of." Now, burnt-offerings were slain beasts, whose bodies, laid on the altar, were all consumed by fire.

Poor Abraham ! had God said, I will make thy dear son sick ; had he even said, In a few hours Isaac shall die : this would not half so much have pained his heart. But to be told to take his son for a sacrifice, and to offer him himself,—his only son Isaac ! Isaac, whom he loved !—Oh, how dreadful ! When little children are sick or die, their parents half break their hearts with grief ; but what do they suffer compared with poor Abraham, called to slay his own dear son ! Perhaps he was struck almost dumb with wonder. Perhaps he wept very bitterly. Perhaps he prayed that Isaac might be spared. But God's will must be done, and he said nothing against it.





You may wonder that God should command him to kill his son ; and were any one to suppose he had such a command now, he would show that he was tempted by the wicked spirit, and not tried by the Almighty : but, in those times, God spake in various ways to pious men, so that they knew when he did speak ; and Abraham knew that he would not order him to do any thing that was wrong.

“ And Abraham rose up early in the morning, and saddled his ass, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son, and clave the wood for the burnt-offering, and rose up, and went unto the place of which God had told him.”

This journey took Abraham three days, so that all this time he might have repented and turned back. But Abraham knew that God was able to raise up his son, even from the dead ; and as God had told him that Isaac should be his heir, he would not dispute his word, but went on his way.

And now he came near the spot, and leaving the young men, he went up the mountain. “ And Abraham took the wood of the burnt-offering, and laid it upon Isaac his son ; and he took the fire in his hand, and a knife ; and they went both of them together.” Oh, what a moment was this for poor Abraham ! in a few minutes more, and his dear, *dear* son Isaac must be killed, and bleed like a lamb upon the altar ; so he thought. Who can tell how much he was pained at his heart ? but still he obeyed God. And if God now tells us to do things difficult for our nature to do, still we must obey him. We must even try to love our enemies and do them good, because he has told us to do so ; though this is very hard to our nature, which likes revenge.

Isaac had been taught, by his good father, to sacrifice to God, as was the custom of those days, and he began to wonder where the sacrifice was, and very innocently said, “ My father ; behold the fire and the wood : but where is the lamb for a burnt-offering ? ” Oh, how this must have touched the good old man's heart ! Isaac had been a good son, and it was no wonder, then, if he dearly loved him. But he could not then make up his mind to tell him, and he only said—still, perhaps, hoping that God would spare him in the end—“ My son, God will provide





himself a lamb for a burnt-offering ;" so they went both of them together.

And now Abraham built the altar, and laid the wood in order—oh, did not his hands and his heart tremble? And now, perhaps, he said with a trembling voice, "My Isaac, my dearly beloved Isaac! my son! my own son! my only son! thou joy of my old age! Oh, how shall I tell thee—but I must; thou art the sacrifice, and God has required it." Perhaps, too, he sobbed and ceased to speak in the midst of his grief: all this was not unlikely. But, perhaps, as he had great faith in God, he shed no tear, nor breathed a single sigh. He knew that all he did must be right; at least he had much of such a spirit in him; and, like Abraham, when God afflicts us, we ought to say as Jesus Christ has taught us, "Thy will be done."

Isaac was a good youth. He was now about twenty years old. He had learnt to love and serve God. It does not appear that he tried one moment to resist his good old father, who was one hundred and twenty years of age. He had gone with delight to worship God and join in the sacrifice; and now he was to be the offering—he gave himself willingly up. Oh, how must God love such obedient hearts!

Here, my dear young reader, let me tell you, that through life God will require you to give up many things to him, as he did require of Abraham to give up his son. And you must learn to do it without a murmur at what he does, for he doth all things well.

Your pious parents and teachers, who know better than you what God requires, must also be obeyed. You will never be asked by them to give up your life upon the altar, yet you may be asked to do many things not quite pleasant to your will; but if they think your doing or not doing any thing is according to God's will, then you will obey them as Abraham's son obeyed him.

And now "Abraham stretched forth his hand and took the knife to slay his son."—It is enough. God has tried him. He is willing to obey his commands, but God does not want innocent blood. "And the angel of the Lord called unto him out of





heaven, and said, Abraham, Abraham, lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him; for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son, from me." Now the trial was over. God had proved Abraham, and, like pure metal passed through the fire, he found him very precious. His faith had not failed.

"And Abraham lifted up his eyes, and looked, and behold, behind him a ram caught in a thicket by his horns; and Abraham went and took the ram, and offered him up for a burnt-offering in the stead of his son."

Now you have read the history, and learnt something from it. You see that when God had tried the love of Abraham, he had kindness in reserve for him after all, and spared his son. Isaac must then have been dearer to him than ever, and God for his goodness dearer to them both.

This history reminds us of the love of God, in giving his Son, his only Son, for a sacrifice for us. "God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him might not perish, but have everlasting life." "He spared not his own Son, but freely gave him up for us all!" "Behold the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sins of the world." No sacrifice would do in the room of the dear Saviour, when he gave himself for us. But it was to point to his sacrifice, and to show that one better than all others together, should come, by constantly reminding good men of it in times past, that Abraham and all the pious then offered sacrifices to God. And these never ceased till Jesus Christ came, who is called the "offering once for all." Then all sacrifices were over, for Jesus had bled and died for the sins of a guilty world.

We shall have occasion to return to this subject very often; at present, let us admire the faith of Abraham, and the great love of God and of his Son Jesus Christ.





TWENTY-THIRD CHAPTER OF GENESIS.

The Death of Sarah.

"And Sarah was an hundred and seven and twenty years old these were the years of the life of Sarah.
"And Sarah died."—Vers. 1, 2.

Though we may be ever so good, and God may love us ever so much, we must all die. This, my dear little friends, is on account of sin. Had there been no sin, there would have been no death; but the "wages of sin is death:" this is what it deserves, or earns, just as when you do what you are told not to do, you deserve to be corrected for it: or just as a man who does work, receives his pay.

"And Sarah died:" and we also read that "Abraham came to mourn for Sarah, and to weep for her:" for he was probably at a distance, feeding his flocks when she died. It is very affecting to lose our friends. And no doubt Isaac wept for Sarah too. And would not you, if you were to lose your dear mother from whom you have received so much kindness? But if we lose our friends, and they and we love Jesus Christ, we may hope to meet again in a better world.

Perhaps you may now have lost a mother,—one that feared God, and told you to do the same. Well, you cannot restore her, to sit on her knee, and be held by her hand, and have her advice any more; but you may call to mind her prayers and her kind words. And you may take the comfort, even if both parents are dead, that God still lives, and that if we fear him, he has said, "I will be a father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters."

We are also told that Abraham bought a burying-place of one whose name was Ephron, and he paid for it at the gates of the city called Mamre, afterwards known by the name Hebron. The gates or ways into the city, like Temple-bar in London, and many





other archways in other places, had, it is thought, rooms over them, where the chief men settled all matters of right among the people. Here Abraham agreed for the price, and paid the money for the burying-place. "And Abraham weighed to Ephron the silver" he was to pay; for they did not count out small bits of gold and silver for eagles and dollars as we do now, but they weighed them out in quantities as we do many other things. The weight was four hundred shekels of silver! Perhaps you would like to know what a shekel of silver was worth, as you will often read of it in Scripture;—it was worth about fifty-six cents; and so the field of Machpelah before Mamre, and the burying-place in it, cost Abraham about two hundred and fifty dollars.

You may further read in this chapter, that Abraham buried his wife in the cave of the field of Machpelah before Mamre, in the land of Canaan. It was usual in those times, and in that country, to bury people in caves, which were like little chambers, cut out of the side of some hill, or vaults bricked or arched over; and here the whole of a family would lie together. This is "the house appointed for all living;" and though we may have no other spot on earth, we must all have a burial-place; or though we may own ever so much of the earth, a burial-place must be our only lot in the earth at last.

THE TWENTY-FOURTH CHAPTER OF GENESIS.

The Marriage of Isaac and Rebekah.

"And Abraham said unto his eldest servant of his house that ruled over all that he had, Put, I pray thee, thy hand under my thigh:

"And I will make thee swear by the Lord, the God of heaven, and the God of the earth, that thou shalt not take a wife unto my son of the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I dwell:

"But thou shalt go unto my country, and to my kindred, and take a wife unto my son Isaac."—Vers. 2, 3, 4.

Abraham was now one hundred and forty years old, for he was one hundred years old when Isaac was born, and Isaac was forty





years old when he married Rebekah. Like a kind father, he was desirous of his son doing well and being happy in life, and he wished to see Isaac married. But as there were people who served false gods all around him, he would have his son take care not to choose any one of them for a wife; he therefore called his steward, who was the head servant of his house, and no doubt a good and faithful man, and he desired him to take an oath, or give his solemn word, that he would go among his relations, where the true God was worshipped, and seek him a wife.

See here how careful Abraham was that his son should have nothing to do with wicked people, and that he should not have a wife of that kind to live with him. We ought always to take care not to live with the wicked, lest they should teach us to do wrong.

The servant put his hand under Abraham's thigh; and this was a sign used at that time to show that he swore, or promised faithfully,—for by swearing is not meant in this case the use of any wicked words; Abraham was too good a man to want such words to be used—he would rather have reproved any one for using them.

And see here, too, what respect good servants deserve from their masters and their masters' children: Abraham trusts this matter entirely with his servant, and Isaac no doubt approved of it, for he was old enough to have objected. If you have any good and faithful servants in your family, thank God for them, and esteem them for their good character, and always behave kindly to them.

If any of my little readers should be servants themselves, or expect so to be, let them see how much such are respected if they are good and honest: for, though Abraham's servant was one of high rank in his house, yet, had he been of lower rank, his good conduct would still have secured his master's regard.

And now the good servant, having sworn to his master, set out on his way to the city of Nahor, or where Nahor lived, who was Abraham's brother. This city was called Haran, and was in the country called Mesopotamia. "And the servant took ten camels, of the camels of his master, and departed: for all the goods of his



master were in his hand," or trusted to his care: and of these, no doubt with the advice and permission of Abraham, he took just as many as were wanted to answer all the ends of his journey.



The camel is a very useful beast in the eastern parts of the world, and rich people had then, and still have, great numbers of these animals: they are very strong, and will carry very large loads—as much as a thousand pounds in weight. Some have two humps on their back, and some have one; they will go long journeys through hot deserts without any water. Abraham's servant took ten of these, laden with presents for the expected wife of Isaac, and her friends.

Having ended his journey of several days, he made his camels to kneel down without the city by a well of water, at the time of the evening—even the time that women go out to draw water.

Camels are early taught to kneel, that they may take rest, and be loaded and unloaded, as they are very high. They were, in this instance, as in others, made to kneel by a well, for the purpose of giving them water.





The women went to the well in the evening to draw water ; and in Arabia, to this day, the women do the same. After they have done their work in the house, such as weaving, grinding corn, making bread, and other things, they take a pitcher or a goat's skin, and, tying their infants behind them, if they have any, they will go two or three miles to the nearest well : for they have not got water in plenty, as we have here.

And now Abraham's servant prayed to God that he would direct, in his providence, that the young woman who should offer him and his camels to drink, should be the wife of Isaac.

We can never hope for a blessing on any thing that we do that is important in life, unless we pray to God for it.

When the servant had done praying, Rebekah, who was the daughter of Bethuel, Abraham's brother's son, came to the well, and brought a pitcher on her shoulder; and she was very kind, and good-natured, and obliging, and did present the servant and his camels with water; and as there were ten camels, it was no small trouble.

And you may also observe that she was very diligent: "She went down to the well, and filled her pitcher, and came up." There were probably other damsels or young women there; but she did not waste her time in idling and gossiping, as some do, but returned quickly about her business.

All this must have pleased the good servant, or rather the steward; and with all this we learn that "the damsel was very fair to look upon," but her beauty would have been nothing, if she had not had good temper.

You must not wonder at Rebekah going to draw the water, for it was quite usual then, and in that country, for persons of the first rank to be so employed. Industry is no disgrace to any one, but idleness always is.

The steward now hoped that his journey would succeed, and he gave Rebekah a golden ear-ring and two bracelets for her arms, which together weighed ten shekels and a half, every shekel of gold being worth about eighteen shillings.

The steward next asked her about her relations, and inquired if they could give him a lodging for himself and camels.





In that country it is quite usual still, for those who have large houses, or roomy tents, to show the same politeness and hospitality to travellers. They have large court-yards for the beasts, and plenty of room for any friends or respectable strangers.

Having so far succeeded, the good man "bowed down his head, and worshipped the Lord," or thanked God. We ought always to thank God for all our comforts.

And now Rebekah, having learnt who he was, ran and told her mother: the women lived in apartments by themselves, as they still do in the East. And then her brother Laban soon learnt the news; and he ran out to the man, and invited him in, and told him he had room for himself and camels.

"And the man came into the house; and he ungirded his camels, and gave straw and provender for the camels, and water to wash his feet, and the men's feet that were with him."

Good travellers always take great care of their beasts: and humane people always remember that they are tired, and need food and rest as well as they do; and therefore they cannot be happy till their poor beasts are put to rest, after laboring hard in their master's service. Laban was aware how much the camels needed comfort as well as their master: and hence he instantly ordered them what was necessary, as well as water to cool and cleanse the feet of the travellers, and food for them also.

Laban's father was perhaps dead, or not able to move about with age, and so Laban was the acting master of the house. It is the custom in the East still for the master to be active in inviting his guests.

And now the steward told about his master's wealth, and that he had a son born in his old age, and what had passed between him and his master about Isaac's marriage, and what he had prayed, and what had happened at the well.

When he had finished, Laban and Bethuel agreed to let Rebekah go, as they saw God's will was in the matter. This Bethuel is thought to have been a younger brother of Rebekah, and not the father. And they blessed Rebekah, or expressed the kindest wishes for her, that she might be comforted in her children, and that they might be many, and overcome all their enemies.





“And Rebekah arose, and her damsels, and they rode upon the camels, and followed the man; and the servant took Rebekah, and went his way.”

And it happened that Isaac was walking in the field on the evening of their arrival; and seeing them coming, he went towards them. And Rebekah inquired of the steward who he was; and as was, and is, the custom of that country, she put a veil on her face as a token of modesty on meeting Isaac; for nothing in a female is so lovely as modesty in behaviour.

And now the different customs required were all gone through, and Isaac took Rebekah to be his companion for life; and he loved her: and Isaac was comforted after his mother's death.

Thus, as one observes, “What is begun in prayer, ends in praise.”

Isaac, it seems, had grieved much at losing his mother; but God can make up for our greatest losses, if we put our trust in him; and his father having given her his mother's tent, he found in his beloved Rebekah more than another mother.

THE TWENTY-FIFTH CHAPTER OF GENESIS.

The Death of Abraham.

“Then Abraham gave up the ghost, and died in a good old age, an old man, and full of years; and was gathered to his people.

“And his sons Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the cave of Machpelah, in the field of Ephron the son of Zohar the Hittite, which is before Mamre;

“The field which Abraham purchased of the sons of Heth: there was Abraham buried, and Sarah his wife.”—Vers. 8—10.

Here is death again. Abraham gave up the ghost, that is, yielded back his spirit to God who gave it; and he was buried in the same tomb with Sarah. Abraham married after he lost Sarah, and he lived to be an hundred three score and fifteen years, that is, sixty and fifteen years; making in all one hundred and seventy-





five years. But this world ended with him, and so it must with us all. How foolish would Abraham have been, had he only placed his hopes on always keeping his flocks and herds, and all the riches which he had ; but Abraham died in faith, and looked for durable riches in heaven. Those that live by faith as he did, will also die by faith like him, and enjoy his rest. You read, in the parable of the Rich Man, that Lazarus was carried by angels into Abraham's bosom, showing us that Abraham was happy, and pious Lazarus was made as happy as he.

It is said he died of "a good old age." My dear little reader, it is not every one of whom this can be said ; some people die in a bad old age. They have lived all their lives in sin ; and that old age which is still spent in sin, is a very bad old age, indeed, for it has no good hope beyond the grave. But Abraham had spent all his best days in serving God ; he looked back upon them with pleasure, and now his old age had become happy and good. "Only fear the Lord and serve him," and if you live to be old, it shall be so with you ; but a sinful life will perhaps prevent you from living till old age, or if you do, instead of being a good old age, it will be a bad old age, both in body and mind.

And here, I must tell you, that Abraham, though a good man, had his faults. You will often read of the faults of good men, as you read your Bible ; and they are told you for two reasons : first, that you should avoid them, and not commit the same ; and secondly, to show that God would not hide them, and that he was displeased with them, and often corrected good men severely for them. But while others live in sin, these did not commit those faults again, and were sorry for them ; and their virtues shone so brightly, that their faults were only like the spots in the sun, very faint and very few, compared with their excellences.

In the twentieth chapter of Genesis, we find Abraham, contrary to that faith or trust which he had in God, guilty, not indeed of telling a lie, but of keeping back the truth when he ought to have spoken it, which was no credit to him. He went into the country of king Abimelech, and as he foolishly feared that the king might take his wife Sarah, and make her a queen, she being very beautiful, he told her to say she was his sister. This was so





far true, for they had both the same father, but not the same mother; but then it implied that she was not his wife. And he had nearly brought himself, and Sarah, and the king, into great distress, by his mistrust of God's care in this instance.

But while we read of these faults and follies in good men, as faithfully told in the Bible, let it lead us to pray to God to keep us from doing the same, and to ask his grace that we may imitate their numerous virtues.

Isaac and Ishmael buried their father with all due regard for his memory; for "the memory of the just is blessed;" even Ishmael paid this respect to the remains of his father, though Ishmael was not a good man. Thus we learn that we should honour our parents; and as you would have your children honour you, if you live to be fathers and mothers, so respect their dust, and commit it with decency and solemnity to the tomb.

THE TWENTY-FIFTH CHAPTER OF GENESIS.

Esau selling his Birthright.

- "And the boys grew: and Esau was a cunning hunter, a man of the field; and Jacob was a plain man, dwelling in tents.
- "And Isaac loved Esau, because he did eat of his venison; but Rebekah loved Jacob.
- "And Jacob sod [or boiled] pottage; and Esau came from the field, and he was faint.
- "And Esau said to Jacob, Feed me, I pray thee, with that said red pottage, for I am faint: therefore was his name called Edom [or Red.]
- "And Jacob said, Sell me this day thy birth-right.
- "And Esau said, Behold, I am at the point to die; and what profit shall this birth-right do to me?
- "And Jacob said, Swear to me this day; and he sware unto him: and he sold his birth-right unto Jacob.
- "Then Jacob gave Esau bread and pottage of lentiles; and he





did eat and drink, and rose up, and went his way; thus Esau despised his birth-right."—Vers. 27—34.

Here is a new race springing up: thus "one generation passeth away" like a shadow, "and another generation cometh." Rebekah is now introduced to us as the mother of Esau and Jacob: these differed in their pursuits; Esau loved hunting, and was cunning in laying his snares to catch his game, while Jacob was a plain man, watching his flocks and his herds.

Esau and Jacob were twins; but Esau having been born a few moments before Jacob, he was reckoned the elder brother.

Now to the elder brother, among the Hebrews, belonged many benefits: among the rest, he had honour paid him next to his parents; he had a double portion of the inheritance; and the Messiah, or Jesus Christ, was to be born, in time, of his family—a blessing of the greatest price.

Jacob aimed to get the birth-right, or privileges of the first-born; and it appears from another part of this book, that his mother, being fond of him, wished him to have it, and no doubt set Jacob to watch his moment to supplant his brother. This affair began wrongly, caused much trouble, and shows that children are not always the most happy if their parents are so unwise as to love one better than another; therefore wise parents love all alike. Besides, if God designed Jacob to have the birth-right, he would have had it without outwitting his brother.

This is a blot in Jacob's character; and it afterwards led to another, as one bad thing generally does. But Jacob turned out an excellent man at last; we must therefore follow that which was good in him, and not dwell on his faults.

Esau, however, deserved to lose his birth-right, for he did not seem to set much value upon it, when he sold it for a paltry mess of pottage. No doubt he could have got something else in his mother's house; but, on reaching home, hungry and tired after hunting, nothing else would suit his fancy but Jacob's mess which he had been preparing; and so Jacob, seizing the opportunity, made his bargain, and tricked poor Esau.





Jacob's pottage was made of lentiles—what were they? A kind of bean which is still used in those parts, and makes a drink, looking red, something like coffee: and for this "Esau despised his birth-right."

But many who blame Esau do worse than he. They cannot have the sins and follies of this world, and heaven; but they prefer the silly things called pleasures, and risk the happiness of religion; and so, as Esau, for one morsel of meat they sell their heavenly inheritance, and lose that good part which shall not be taken away from them.

THE TWENTY-SIXTH CHAPTER OF GENESIS.

Isaac's Prosperity.

"And the man waxed great, and went forward, and grew, until he became very great,
"For he had possession of flocks, possession of herds, and great store of servants: and the Philistines envied him."—Vers. 13, 14.

This chapter chiefly tells us of Isaac's prosperity. God had promised to bless him, and he did bless him.

But Isaac committed another fault, like Abraham, when he went in a famine to get food at the same place, called Gerar; and lest Rebekah should be taken away from him, he also would not own her as his wife.

This is a speck on Isaac's good character, and should teach us, my dear young reader, that if such good men as Abraham and Isaac did such very wrong things, we ought to be very careful indeed, and to pray to God to keep us from doing what must be sure to displease him. Isaac, indeed, thought to prevent evil by what he did; but, though this may seem to excuse him, we must not do evil even that good may come.



JACOB'S DREAM.



ISAAC BLESSING JACOB.



THE RECONCILIATION OF ESAU AND JACOB.





THE TWENTY-SEVENTH CHAPTER OF GENESIS.

Isaac blessing Jacob..

‘And he [Isaac] said [to Esau,] Thy brother [Jacob] came with subtilty, and hath taken away thy blessing.”—Ver. 35.

The following is the history in this chapter :—

Isaac was now very old ; it is reckoned that he must have been about one hundred and seventeen years of age, and that Jacob was about fifty-seven. The old man’s eyes were grown nearly blind with age. He thought that, from the length of years he had lived, his life could not last much longer. He therefore desired his son Esau to come and take the blessing which belonged to the first-born.

As a proof of his obedience to his father, he asked him to get him some of his nice meat, which he killed with the bow and arrow : and when he had prepared it, he was to have the blessing.

This blessing was a very solemn thing. It was what parents used to give to their children when they were about to die and leave them behind ; and the patriarchs had a spirit of prophecy given them from heaven, so that what they said foretold what was to come to pass respecting their families. The first-born always had a right to the best blessing.

Now, Rebekah heard what Isaac said to Esau, and, as Jacob was her favorite son, she resolved that he should try and get the blessing. There is some excuse for her conduct, because she had been told from God himself, in a particular way, respecting her sons before they were born, “The elder shall serve the younger”—yet not excuse enough for her to tell Jacob to do that which was wrong, to bring about what God had promised. This was very foolish ; and because she did wrong, she was punished afterwards by many troubles which sprung out of this very affair, like bitter branches out of a bitter root.

Rebekah told Jacob to take two kids from his flocks and let her have them, and she would make savoury meat of them for





Isaac; and he should go to him under the pretence that he was Esau, and offer the meat, and get the blessing; for as Isaac was almost blind, he could not see his face clearly.

Jacob, however, remembered that Esau was a strong man, covered with hair; and he thought, that, if his father touched him, he would find out that it was not Esau, and that he would be so displeased at his trying to deceive him, that he would curse him instead of blessing him.

But his mother encouraged him; and to make his skin like Esau's, she fitted some goat-skins to his hands and his neck: for the goats in the East have very delicate hair, which might by its feel pass for that on a strong man's skin.

And now Jacob made haste with the meat, and took it to his father before Esau could come home from hunting. And he said, "I am Esau, thy first-born; I have done according as thou badest me: arise, I pray thee; sit and eat of my venison, that thy soul may bless me."

O Jacob! Jacob! thou couldst not be Esau—thy father never told *thee* to dress the savoury meat! God may pardon thy sin at this time; but thou shalt feel that sin and sorrow go together. Thou shalt be deceived, as thou hast deceived thy father; and for this act thou shalt be banished from thy home, and be afraid of thy life. Always speak the truth, my dear young reader, for it will bring peace and happiness in the end.

However, Jacob did succeed in getting the blessing. His father suspected his voice; but his raiment smelt of the sweet perfumes of Esau's garments, which it is thought were used to keep them from moths, and of which his mother had procured one from his chests on this occasion—perhaps a garment kept for the elder sons.

So Isaac ate of his meat and drank of his wine; which, it is thought, was a kind of religious rite before pronouncing the blessing. "And his father Isaac said, Come near now, and kiss me, my son. And he came near, and kissed him: and he smelled the smell of his raiment, and blessed him, and said, See, the smell of my son is as the smell of a field which the Lord hath blessed." That is, his garments smelt like a field in which sweet spices grow





in abundance, through God's blessing on the soil, as we smell the sweet-scented bean-field when it is in full flower. He added, "Therefore, God give thee of the dew of heaven, and the fatness of the earth, and plenty of corn and wine!" It rains only at particular times in that part of the world; but then God sends heavy dews, something like such as we have about three or four o'clock on a summer's morning, but much thicker; and these falling upon the fields make them rich in crops, yielding corn to grind for bread, and grapes to make wine.

Isaac further said, "Let people serve thee, and nations bow down to thee: be lord over thy brethren, and let thy mother's sons bow down to thee; cursed be every one that curseth thee, and blessed be he that blesseth thee."

Scarcely had Jacob left Isaac when Esau returned, and he hastened to his father with his savoury meat.

But now he was justly punished for selling his birth-right; notwithstanding which, and though he had taken an oath to part with it for the red pottage, he tried to obtain it.

And the old man was all in a tremble. And he asked hastily who had deceived him; but, being governed by a spirit of prophecy, that is, having spoken by the guidance of God, he said of Jacob, "I have blessed him; yea, and he shall be blessed."

Poor Esau now cried bitterly, and he said, "Bless me, even me also, O my father: hast thou not reserved a blessing for me?"

And Isaac gave him a blessing also: but it was not that of the first-born: he lost his birth-right.

My dear young reader, seek the blessing of your *heavenly Father's* peculiar favor. Ask *him* to grant you his loving-kindness, which is better than life. There is no fear in seeking this, that the blessing is given to another, and cannot be given to you. God has always the best of blessings in store for them that ask him. "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek and ye shall find."

You will be much interested by reading the whole of this chapter, and those chapters connected with it.





THE TWENTY-EIGHTH CHAPTER OF GENESIS.

Jacob's Dream.

- “And he dreamed, and, behold, a ladder set upon the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven; and, behold, the angels of God ascending and descending on it.
- “And, behold, the Lord stood above it, and said, I am the Lord God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac: the land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed.”—Vers. 12, 13.
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Esau was in the greatest rage on account of the loss of his birth-right, and as he expected that his father would soon die, he being very old, he vowed that he would then kill his brother. Rebekah was told what he said, and Jacob, by her advice, fled for safety to his uncle Laban, at Haran; but, before he left, Isaac bade him farewell, and renewed his blessing at parting.

Here the blessing was doubly given him, but as he did wrong things to get it, and was told by his mother to do them, he was punished by being driven away from his home, and she by losing her beloved son.

Isaac also gave Jacob a charge that he should not take any one for a wife that did not serve the true God, and that he should therefore try and marry one of Laban's daughters. Esau knew this, and to vex his father, like a wicked man, he went directly and married a wicked woman.

But Jacob was a good man, though he had not done right in the way in which he tried to get the blessing, which God had said should be his. And though God would make him feel on account of his faults, yet he would pardon him and bless him, as he does all them that truly repent.

“And Jacob went out from Beersheba,” where Isaac and Rebekah now lived, “and went towards Haran. And he lighted upon a certain place, and tarried there all night, because the sun was





set : and he took of the stones of that place, and put them for his pillows, and lay down in that place to sleep."

Jacob's bed was very hard, and in this country we should find such a one likely to give a man his death, after travelling all day forty-eight miles, which is thought by learned travellers to be the distance he went : but it is very common even now for travellers in those parts to sleep in the open air, which is not always unhealthy, as it is here on account of cold and damp ; besides, " Jacob was a plain man, dwelling in tents," and his hardy nature made him feel less the want of the comforts of home.

And, whilst Jacob was asleep, he dreamed the dream mentioned in the verses we just now read.

This was one way in which the Lord spake to the Patriarchs, and Jacob could know that it was divine, and no common dream. The ladder which he saw reaching from heaven to earth, and which was full of angels, or heavenly messengers, going up and down, will show us as well as Jacob, that God's angels watch over us when we sleep, especially if we cast ourselves into God's care ; and how must Jacob's heart have been strengthened, when God himself then spoke and said, " Behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest, and will bring thee again unto this land ; for I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of."

This event was very comforting to Jacob ; and as we ought to remember the mercies of God at all times, he set up a stone on the spot, that he might know it when at any distant time he should return home ; and he poured oil upon it, probably in token that there he would build an altar to worship God ; for " he called the name of that place Bethel," which means *the house of God*, for there he had seen God, and there he hoped again to see him in his gracious goodness towards him. " And Jacob vowed a vow, saying, If God will be with me, and keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on, so that I come again to my father's house in peace ; then shall the Lord be my God : " not that he meant he should not be his God if he did not do all these things for him, for Jacob showed he would have no other God by resolving to take no wife but one





that would serve God ; but he meant that then he would make a particular mention of him, and declare what a God his God was. This appears from what he further says : " This stone which I have set for a pillar, shall be God's house : and of all that thou shalt give me, I will surely give the tenth unto thee."

My dear young reader, you are not perhaps turned out of house and home ; you have a kind parent, or kind parents and friends, to take care of you, and everything promises you future food and raiment. But remember that your dear parents may die, and leave you alone in the world, like Jacob on his journey. You are perhaps left alone, a poor orphan, a child without father and mother, and perhaps cast upon the world, so that by and by you must get your bread by hard labor : then in either case remember Jacob ; look to God Almighty for " bread to eat, and raiment to put on," and he will be sure to raise you up friends ; he will never leave you nor forsake you ; and if God ever blesses you with money, remember too that you ought to do something to help forward the honour of his name in the world, by aiding those causes which are designed to spread abroad the knowledge of the only true God among ignorant and lost mankind ; for Jacob said, " Of all that thou shalt give me, I will surely give the tenth unto thee."

THE TWENTY-NINTH CHAPTER OF GENESIS.

Jacob and Laban.

" And Laban said unto Jacob, Because thou art my brother, shouldst thou therefore serve me for nought ? tell me, what shall thy wages be ?

" And Laban had two daughters : the name of the elder was Leah, and the name of the younger was Rachel.

" Leah was tender-eyed ; but Rachel was beautiful and well-favored.

" And Jacob loved Rachel, and said, I will serve thee seven years for Rachel, thy younger daughter."—Vers. 15—18.





Jacob, now knowing well that God would protect him, went on gladly to Haran, or "The Land of the People of the East," as it lay east of Canaan.

On coming to Haran he saw a well—perhaps the same where Abraham's servant stopped; and there is a well near that spot still, called by some Jacob's Well, although Jacob was there between three and four thousand years ago. There he also stopped; and there were flocks of sheep resting near it, waiting for water, attended by their shepherds.

Jacob very civilly spoke to the shepherds, and asked if they knew Laban. They told him that they did know him—that he was well, and that Rachel, his daughter, was then coming with her father's sheep, to get water for them.

Jacob rolled away the great stone which covered the well, to keep the water clean, "and watered the flock of Laban, his mother's brother."

He then kissed his dear relation, Rachel, telling her who he was; and she ran and told her father.

Laban hastened to the well, and was glad to see Jacob, and asked him to go home with him.

Jacob then told him "all these things;"—that he had got his brother's birth-right—that Esau had for this cause said that he would kill him—that he had come there for safety—that God had appeared to him by the way in a dream, and had promised to protect him and prosper him—that he had met with Rachel at the well—and that he had come to take a wife from out of his family.

Laban told him that he might live with him and mind his flocks; but he should have wages for his work.

As Jacob had no presents to make for his daughter, according to the custom of the country, he told his uncle that he would serve him seven years, if he would agree that Rachel should then become his wife.

When the seven years were gone, Jacob said, "Give me my wife,"—but his uncle cheated him, and gave him Leah. He, however, promised him Rachel, if he would serve seven years more.





Here you see that Jacob, having cheated Isaac by pretending to be Esau, was just served in the same way by Laban, who gave him Leah instead of Rachel. Unfair dealings will always come home in the end to those who are guilty of them. Learn, my young reader, to do all things openly and honestly, as good people ought to do them, and not by mean craft and cunning, which is a disgrace to him who shows it.

After seven days' feasting, as was usual, Jacob had also Rachel for his wife, for whom he was to serve another seven years.

You have been told before, that more wives than one were then allowed, though not now.

Jacob, after a while, was the father of a large family.

THE THIRTIETH CHAPTER OF GENESIS.

Jacob and his Flocks.

"And it came to pass, when Rachel had borne Joseph, that Jacob said unto Laban, Send me away, that I may go unto mine own place, and to my country.

"Give me my wives and my children, for whom I have served thee, and let me go: for thou knowest my service which I have done thee.

"And Laban said unto him, I pray thee, if I have found favour in thine eyes, tarry: for I have learned by experience that the Lord hath blessed me for thy sake.

"And he said, Appoint me thy wages, and I will give it."—Vers. 25—28.

The fourteen years which Jacob had engaged to serve for Rachel and Leah being expired, he wanted to return to see his father; having got no other reward for very hard service than Laban's daughters, with their families.

But Laban did not like to part with Jacob, for God had blessed him for Jacob's sake. It is a great blessing to be connected with really good people.





Now Laban knew that Jacob was not a covetous man, as he himself was, and that he would not ask him too much for his services; so he said to him, "Appoint me," or fix "thy wages, and I will give it."

Then said Jacob, you shall give me all the speckled and spotted goats and sheep that may from this time be brought forth among the flocks. Some think that he chose this colour because the shepherds of Canaan were fond of it. Laban was quite pleased with the bargain, and readily agreed to it; for he thought that if all the speckled and spotted sheep and goats then in the flock were removed, it would be a long time before Jacob would have many for his services. "And he removed that day the he-goats that were ring-straked and spotted, and all the she-goats that were speckled and spotted, and every one that had some white in it, and all the brown among the sheep, and gave them into the hands of his sons. And he set three days' journey,"—that is, three days' journey for cattle which do not travel very fast,—“betwixt himself and Jacob. And Jacob fed the rest of Laban's flocks”—that is, all those that had no spots or marks upon them, being entirely white; and which, as cattle produce after their kind, were only likely to bring forth white lambs and kids: so great was Laban's jealousy, lest any of those should mix with the rest of the flock, to the advantage of Jacob.

And now a fine bargain Jacob has made for himself! Is this his providing for his own house, to put it upon such an uncertainty? If these cattle bring forth, as usually cattle do, young ones of the same colour with themselves, he must still serve for nothing, and be a drudge and a beggar all the days of his life. But Jacob trusted in God.

Now Jacob knew a method, which it is supposed was used by the shepherds in Canaan, who were reputed to be fond of speckled coloured sheep, by which he could cause many of the flocks to bring forth of mixed colours; but in this he could not have succeeded but by the divine blessing, and, therefore, he ascribes it all to God. Indeed, though we may be ever so skilled in what we do, we ought always to remember, that without God's blessing, all our skill will never prosper us. It is this that maketh rich,





and addeth no sorrow thereto. Jacob, therefore, used this method, and "took him rods of green poplar, and of the hazel, and chesnut tree; and pilled white strakes in them," as we do when we tear strips of the bark from a green stick, "and made the white appear which was in the rods. And he set the rods which he had pilled before the flocks in the gutters in the watering troughs when the flocks came to drink. And the flocks brought forth cattle ring-straked, speckled, and spotted." So that, instead of producing white lambs and kids for Laban, the flocks produced those which were spotted and striped. This was very strange, but so it was; and so Jacob prospered.

Some think he was to blame for what he did, as he might be thought to have tricked his uncle, who had hoped to trick him, which would have been showing a cunning unworthy of an honest man; but as it was to do himself justice where it had not been done, and he relied for the success of his plan wholly upon God, he is generally thought not to deserve any blame.

So we learn, "the man increased exceedingly, and had much cattle, and maid-servants, and men-servants, and camels, and asses."

THE THIRTY-FIRST CHAPTER OF GENESIS.

Jacob's escape from Laban.

"And the Lord said unto Jacob, Return unto the land of thy fathers, and to thy kindred; and I will be with thee."—Ver. 3.

Laban and his sons, seeing how Jacob prospered, put on very black looks towards him. Being under the divine direction, and having consulted his wives upon the subject, he therefore resolved to quit Laban, and return to Canaan.

"Then Jacob rose up, and set his sons and his wives upon camels; and he carried away all his cattle, and all his goods which he had gotten, the cattle of his getting, which he had gotten in Padan-aran [or Mesopotamia], for to go to Isaac his father in the land of Canaan."

"And it was told Laban on the third day that Jacob was fled.



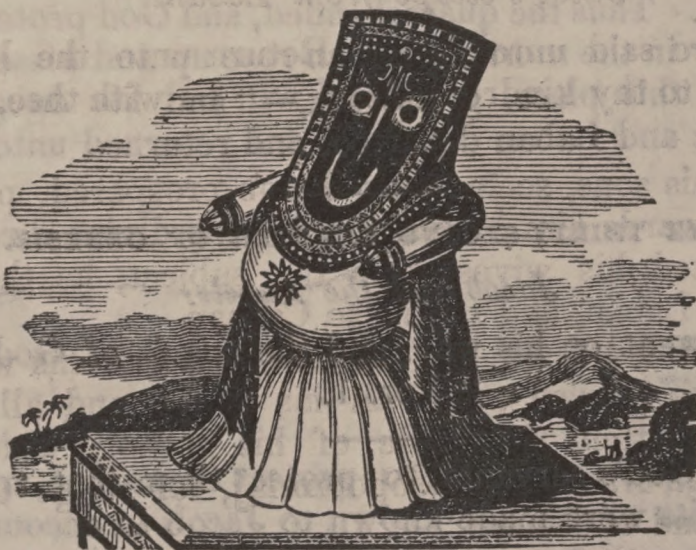


And he took his brethren with him, and pursued after him seven days' journey; and they overtook him in the mount Gilcad," a distance of three hundred and eighty miles from Haran.

Laban might have designed to bring Jacob back by fair promises, or else to have avenged himself upon him in case of refusal, but "God came to Laban the Syrian in a dream by night, and said unto him, Take heed that thou speak not to Jacob either good or bad."

Laban, therefore, only accused Jacob of running away from him, and of taking away his *gods*.

For Rachel, unknown to Jacob, had stolen some things supposed to have been images or brass-work, which Laban used to consult like a conjuror, to know what would come to pass. Probably, Rachel knew better than to suppose that they were of any use, but wished to take such silly things from her deluded father. He, therefore, supposing that Jacob had got them, said, "Wherefore hast thou stolen my gods?" "Foolish man! to call those his gods that could be stolen!" And yet, my dear young reader, there are millions of your fellow-creatures, in distant parts of the world, who now worship as gods things of the most absurd kind, made of wood and other articles, and know nothing of Jesus Christ, the only Saviour of perishing sinners. One of these idol Gods, worshipped by millions of people in India, is shown in the picture.





Do you not pity the poor creatures who can call this a god? and will you not do all in your power to send them the news of a divine Saviour?

Laban searched everywhere for his gods, but could not find them; and he made Jacob angry by his rude behaviour: however, if Jacob was wrong in being angry, Laban was not less so in provoking him by his bad conduct.

Jacob told him how hard a master he had been, for he had made him pay for the cattle torn by wild beasts and stolen; he had had fourteen years' service for his two daughters, and six years' for the cattle, and had changed his wages no less than ten times; being never contented with his bargains: so that if God had not prospered him, he would never have had anything for all his labour.

Laban, notwithstanding, took the praise of having made Jacob rich; and Jacob, not being disposed to quarrel with him, let him say what he pleased.

Laban then proposed an agreement between them, which Jacob was very ready to make; and they set up some stones as a mark, and gave a promise that they would never pass those stones with designs to do harm to each other; and "the God of Abraham" was asked to witness the promise: for wherever we are, we are under God's eye, and he knows all that we say and do. They also offered a sacrifice and ate bread together, as a proof that they both parted friends. Thus the quarrel ended, and God protected Jacob.

"And early in the morning Laban rose up and kissed his sons,—that is, in this place, grandsons,—and his daughters, and blessed them: and Laban departed, and returned unto his place."

THE THIRTY-SECOND CHAPTER OF GENESIS.

Jacob and the Angels.

"And Jacob went on his way, and the angels of God met him."
Ver. 1.

Angels are God's servants, to protect them that trust in him, and these spirits were made known to Jacob to encourage him in his journey.





Now Jacob had great need of this encouragement, for he had to pass by the way in which he might meet with his brother Esau ; and remembering how he had obtained his birth-right, and therefore, how much reason Esau had to be angry, he was afraid of his vengeance—Esau not being a good man.

“And Jacob sent messengers before him to Esau his brother unto the land of Seir, the country of Edom.” These were to tell him of his long absence, and troubles under a hard master, that Esau’s heart might be softened. They were also to speak of his prosperity, that he might not suppose that he wanted more of him ; and to address him from Jacob in language of respect, and express his wish that they might meet each other as brothers.

The messengers returned, and said that Esau was coming, and four hundred men with him.

Poor Jacob was now sadly frightened ; for he feared that his brother would kill him and the children, and take all that he had.

He therefore divided the people and flocks into two bands, so that if he fell upon one, the other might have time to escape ; and so, his wife and children being in the hindmost band, he might save their lives.

He also prayed to God to protect him, for all our wisdom or courage cannot protect us in danger without God’s care.

He then thought that he would send presents to his brother, to gain his good will : and after a night had passed away full of much care, he ordered servants to go one after another with different droves of cattle of various sorts, amounting in all to the number of five hundred and eighty ; which, when they met Esau, they were to tell him were sent by his brother for his acceptance.

“So went the present over before him,” and another night passed.

And now having passed his family over the river Jabbok, Jacob was left alone on the side nearest to Haran, and here an angel of God met him. How he conversed with and wrestled with the angel, as related in the chapter, it is not possible to say, but so it was : and before they parted, the angel gave him the name of Israel, or a *Prince of God*, and blessed him.





THE THIRTY-THIRD CHAPTER OF GENESIS.

Jacob and Esau.

"And Jacob lifted up his eyes, and looked, and behold, Esau came, and with him four hundred men."

"And Esau ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck, and kissed him : and they wept."—Vers. 1, 4.

Jacob, having divided the people and flocks into separate bodies, now went forward to meet Esau ; and after the custom of the East, he bowed himself frequently *to the ground*. The manner of bowing in the East is different from ours—here is a picture of a person so doing. And then Esau, having got off the



beast he probably rode, ran to him, and with all the kind feelings of a brother, put his arms round his neck and kissed him.

If Esau had come with any design to do Jacob harm, God had softened his heart ; and certainly he showed a noble spirit in forgiving his brother who had once done him so much injury, but who now, however, showed how much he wished to make him amends for it. So should children forgive one another, and





kiss one another when offended—and especially brothers and sisters; and such acts of tenderness must yield a pleasure which none can know but those who practice them.

Next Jacob's family approached Esau, and bowed themselves also, and then Jacob offered his presents to his brother.

But Esau, not being covetous, wanted nothing to reconcile him. Here Esau looks very amiable, notwithstanding his former rage; and many men may have amiable dispositions, who do not, after all, love and serve God. This should make us look very closely at our hearts; and if people call you good children, because you behave well, are good-tempered, and are dutiful to your parents, do not mistake all this for religion, for it is only a small part of it; as real religion requires us to love and serve God with the best affections of our hearts.

Jacob, however, was not quite sure of his brother's sincerity, and, perhaps, feared that when the first warm feeling of his heart had been shown, it would grow cooler, and he might be in danger; he therefore said, "Nay, I pray thee, if now I have found grace in thy sight, then receive my present at my hand: for therefore I have seen thy face, as though I had seen the face of God,"—meaning that it was pleasant, as a sight of God's favour is also pleasant,—“and thou wast pleased with me.” In Eastern countries, if a present be offered to a superior, and he will not take it, there is much to fear from his refusal; but if he accept it, it is a mark of his favour and protection, and there is nothing to fear.

Jacob also wished to give his brother something in token of kindness, and in return for the harm he had formerly done him. “And he urged him, and he took it:” Jacob at the same time adding his blessing,—showing that he wished him all happiness and prosperity.

Esau now offered either to keep him company, or to leave some servants behind as a guard of honour or safety, that he might look more grand, or be protected against dangers; but this Jacob did not need, and so they parted.

Jacob went for a while to a place called Succoth, and afterwards he removed to “Shalem, a city of Shechem,” and there he bought some land for the use of his cattle.





There also he erected an altar, and called it by a name which meant *God, the God of Israel*: thus he returned thanks to God for having preserved him and blest him, and allowed him to return to the land of Canaan.

THE THIRTY-FOURTH CHAPTER OF GENESIS.

The Slaying of the Shechemites.

“And they (Simeon and Levi) slew Hamor, and Shechem his son, with the edge of the sword, and took Dinah out of Shechem’s house, and went out.”—Ver. 26.

Jacob had one daughter, called Dinah, and she was, most likely, on that account, the darling of the family, and too much indulged; but “those children neither prove the best nor the *happiest* that are most *indulged*.”

Dinah probably thinking herself lonely at home, wished to go and see “the daughters of the land,” and to visit the ungodly people of Shechem; and her mother, perhaps from a foolish fondness, gave her leave.

It is thought that it was a kind of festival or fair time; and then children, and grown people too, fall into a great deal of wickedness. Fairs are no places for good children, where they can hear nothing but swearing, and see nothing that can do them any real good. It is much better for children to love home, and good parents will make it pleasant to them without spoiling them.

Dinah was now about fifteen or sixteen years of age; and Shechem, the prince of the country, having seen her, resolved to take her by force and carry her home, and never let her return to her father’s house again, but have her for his wife.

But the family of Israel were not to marry with any of those who were not worshippers of the true God.

Shechem and his father Hamor, however, did all they could to persuade Jacob to let Shechem keep his daughter, for whom he felt a strong affection; and as in those times a man gave a *dowry*,





or something of value to the parents for taking away their daughters for wives, Shechem offered any sum that might be asked.

Jacob's sons pretended to agree, but on one condition, which was, that the Shechemites should practise the religious forms of the Hebrews. To this, Hamor and his son consented; and so did all the people, out of regard to their prince, who seems, notwithstanding his carrying away Dinah, to have had some good qualities; for he wished to do all he could to show respect to her and her family, and to express his sorrow for having done what was wrong. And here we may learn a good lesson—always to make haste and repair any injury we may have done to others; though it is still better to avoid doing them any injury at all.

The Shechemites, having fulfilled their agreement, and submitted to the religious customs of the Hebrews, fully relied on their good faith; but, when they were quite off their guard, two of the sons of Jacob, Simeon and Levi, Dinah's brethren, took each man his sword, and came upon the city boldly, and slew all the males, and rescued their sister. And "they took their sheep, and their oxen, and their asses, and that which was in the city, and that which was in the field. And all their wealth, and all their little ones, and their wives took they captive, and spoiled even all that was in the house."

This was a treacherous and cruel act on the part of Jacob's sons, and he could not but be very angry at it. It was, indeed, just in God to permit the Shechemites so to perish, for they had only become religious for the sake of pleasing their prince, and benefiting by their union with the Hebrews; so that their religion was all a pretence: and God hates hypocrisy, or people's pretending to be what they are not, especially in religion. Take care, my young reader, that you are sincere in worshipping and serving God.

But as far as it respected Jacob's sons doing this act, it was very wicked, for they broke their faith with the Shechemites, and good people should always keep their word; and besides that, they punished a whole city for the fault of one man, which was making the innocent to suffer with the guilty.





Jacob feared now for the honour of religion, as well as for the safety of his family: for who after this would be likely to trust an Israelite? and if God did not particularly guard him, all the tribes round about might fall upon him, to revenge so cruel a deed.

Jacob remembered this to his last hour; and on his dying bed he said, "Simeon and Levi are brethren; instruments of cruelty are in their habitations. Oh, my soul, come not thou into their secret; unto their assembly, mine honour, be not thou united."

THE THIRTY-FIFTH CHAPTER OF GENESIS.

Jacob and the strange Gods.

"Then Jacob said unto his household, and to all that were with him, Put away the strange gods that are among you, and be clean, and change your garments:

"And let us arise, and go up to Bethel; and I will make there an altar unto God, who answered me in the day of my distress, and was with me in the way which I went."—Ver. 2, 3.

While Jacob was perplexed about the cruel conduct of his sons Simeon and Levi, and afraid lest it should bring a host of enemies upon him, God appeared to him, and commanded him to remove to Bethel.

Jacob then ordered all the false gods to be put out of his family, which it is supposed that the servants he brought from Syria, when he left Laban, had kept among them, and, perhaps, some had been brought from the Shechemites.

And here, while we are speaking of false gods, I may tell you a little tale or fable, which you know is not exactly true, but is an amusing way of showing, in a fancied form, what is real.

The Jews have a number of stories of this kind, which have been repeated among them from time to time for many hundreds of years, and may, perhaps, have a little truth in them; but they





have got altered so in a course of time, as, perhaps, to have lost nearly, if not quite, the whole of their original form.

I will tell you one of their stories in this place, which will amuse you, and, at the same time, serve to show the folly of worshipping heathen gods.

They said that Terah, the father of Abraham, was an idolater, and likewise a dealer in, and maker of, idols. It chanced one time, that Terah went on a journey, and left Abraham to take care of, and dispose of, the idols during his absence.

You will remember again, my young reader, that this is only a story made by the Jews, and is not in the Bible.

When a man came to purchase an idol, Abraham asked him his age. When the man had answered him, Abraham replied, "Can it be possible, that a person of your years can be so stupid as to worship that which was made but yesterday?" The man, being quite overwhelmed with shame, hung down his head and departed. In this manner he served several. At length there came an old woman, with a measure of fine flour in her hand, which she told him she had brought as an offering to all the idols. Abraham at this was exceedingly wroth, and took a large stick, and broke all the idols, except the largest, which he left whole, and put the stick into his hand.

When Terah returned, and perceived all the idols broken, he asked Abraham how that came to pass? Abraham informed him, "That there came an old woman, and brought an offering of fine flour to the idols; upon which they immediately *fell together by the ears* for the prize, when the large one killed them all with the stick which he held in his hand."

Terah, feeling the full force of the satire, or ridicule, was very angry indeed, and immediately had Abraham before Nimrod, in order to have him punished for the contempt shown to his gods.

Nimrod commanded him to worship his deities; which Abraham refusing, Nimrod had him immediately thrown into a fiery furnace, from which he came out unhurt. Thus ends the story.

Jacob now ordered the garments of his people also to be changed, for, perhaps, many of them were stained with blood in the late cruel affair.





He likewise took away a quantity of ear-rings, which were either stuck in the ears of the false gods, or worn by the people as charms to protect them, as they thought, from danger; and these he buried with the strange gods under an oak tree, near Shechem, that nobody might have them any more.

And though Jacob was now in as much or more danger than he was formerly from Esau, yet God made the people around afraid of touching him; and so he escaped, and went to Bethel, and there he praised and worshipped God, and set up a pillar, as we build monuments, in remembrance of his goodness.

Jacob then removed from Bethel, and on his journey Benjamin was born, and Rachel his mother died. This chapter also tells us that Deborah, Rebekah's nurse, died; and that Isaac died, aged one hundred and eighty years: he was a good and peaceable man. Esau and Jacob, being reconciled, united in burying their good old father.

Thus one after another goes to the grave, and these histories remind us that we also must die. But Jesus, the kind Saviour, has made death easy to them who believe in him; and they shall never perish, but live again in a better world than this, where they shall have everlasting life.

In this chapter we have also the names of Jacob's twelve sons, who were called the twelve *Patriarchs* or *chiefs*, of numerous families and tribes.

Leah's sons were *six*: Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, and Zebulon. She was also the mother of Dinah, Jacob's daughter.

Rachel had *two* sons, Joseph and Benjamin.

Bilhah, Rachel's handmaid, had *two* sons, Dan and Naphtali. And *Zilpah*, Leah's handmaid, had *two* sons, Gad and Asher.

The tribe of Joseph was usually called after the names of his two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim; and though this would make thirteen tribes, yet Levi was not reckoned among them, as that tribe was appointed by God to be priests, and to do only sacred work.







JOSEPH SOLD.



JOSEPH INTERPRETING PHARAOH'S DREAM.



THE THIRTY-SIXTH CHAPTER OF GENESIS.

Esau's final removal from Canaan.

“And Esau took his wives, and his sons, and his daughters, and all the persons of his house, and his cattle, and all his beasts, and all his substance, which he had got in the land of Canaan; and went into the country from the face of his brother Jacob. For their riches were more than that they might dwell together; and the land wherein they were strangers could not bear them because of their cattle.”—Vers. 6, 7.

You may, perhaps, wish to know what became of Esau after he had buried his father,

He took what property came to him, and left Canaan entirely to his brother Jacob. He had now become very rich, as his father, when he comforted him after he had lost his birth-right, had foretold: “behold, thy dwelling shall be the fatness of the earth, and of the dew of heaven from above.” As it seldom rains in hot countries, the dews that wet the ground make its herbs and trees to bear fruit in abundance; and the words of his father clearly meant, that his lands should be well watered, and bring him much riches; and so it came to pass.

The rest of the chapter tells who were his sons and grandsons, and other persons related to Esau; but we shall go on with the more interesting account of Jacob.

THE THIRTY-SEVENTH CHAPTER OF GENESIS.

Joseph and his Brethren.

“Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his children, because he was the son of his old age: and he made him a coat of many colours.





“And when his brethren saw that their father loved him more than all his brethren, they hated him, and could not speak peaceably unto him.”—Vers. 3, 4.

The history of Joseph is very interesting indeed; he, like our adorable Saviour, was deeply humbled, that he might be highly exalted; and, like Christians in general, had to endure great trials before he was finally raised to honour and happiness.

He was the eldest son of Rachel, the beloved wife of Jacob: he was very dear to his father, because his mother was dead; and he was his comfort, being a dutiful and affectionate child. No wonder, therefore, that his father loved him; but still he was wrong to make so marked a distinction between him and the rest of his brothers. He made him a coat of many colours, probably being cloths of different dyes sewn together in stripes, and this, no doubt, greatly tended to add to the envy of his brethren; besides which, they did bad things, and he told of them—so that at last they hated him, and could not speak a kind word to him.

“Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer,” says the Apostle John; that is, he is so in his heart, and would kill him if he durst; and this they soon tried to do.

Joseph was now seventeen years of age; and though he was his father's darling, he was not brought up in idleness. “Those who are trained up to do nothing, are likely to be good for nothing;” Joseph was therefore a shepherd, and fed the flocks with his brethren.

“And Joseph dreamed a dream,” the particulars of which you can read in this chapter in your Bible. He thought he was binding sheaves in the field, and his brethren's sheaves all bowed to his sheaf. And he dreamed again that the sun, moon, and eleven stars bowed to him.

These his brethren and father explained as meaning that they were to bow to him; and his brethren hated him the more on this account, while his father blamed him for telling such dreams, but kept them in his memory, to see what would come to pass.

Perhaps you will ask if all dreams are true. Certainly not. God





has sometimes warned people of some dangers in this wonderful way, but in those days he spoke to them by these means to bring about great ends. Thus, his telling his dreams to his brethren caused them to do those things which were to bring about what they, indeed, intended to prevent.

"And his brethren went to feed their father's flock in Shechem," where, perhaps, Jacob was afraid they might be in danger of being attacked and killed, as they had attacked and killed the Shechemites. And Jacob sent Joseph to see if they were safe.

At length he "found them in Dothan. And when they saw him afar off, they conspired against him to slay him. And they said one to another, Behold, this dreamer cometh. Come now therefore, let us slay him, and cast him into some pit, and we will say, Some evil beast hath devoured him: and we shall see what will become of his dreams." In this way they proposed to commit murder; and then, as one sin leads to another, to cover that murder with a lie.

Reuben and Judah did not, however, agree in this treatment of their brother; Reuben said, "Do not sin against the child," [see the forty-second chapter,] for Joseph was a child to them. But "they stript Joseph out of his coat, his coat of many colours that was on him; and they took him, and cast him into a pit." Poor Joseph had, in the anguish of his soul, besought them to have pity on him; but they would not hear. [See also the forty-second chapter.] So he was left, after his journey, to perish in the pit with hunger and cold.

But not long after, some Ishmaelites and Midianites, who were merchants, happened to be travelling that way in company; and Judah proposed to sell Joseph to them, by which means they should easily get rid of him, and he would, probably, never be likely to become their master, for he would go into Egypt, and there be sold as a slave. So "they drew and lifted up Joseph out of the pit, and sold Joseph to the Ishmaelites for twenty pieces of silver"—that is about fifteen dollars in our money—and "they brought Joseph into Egypt."

Reuben was just then gone from his brethren; and probably by a round-about way he arrived at the pit, with a design to get his





brother out and send him safe home. But to his surprise he was not there, and as a token of his grief he rent his clothes.

"And they took Joseph's coat, and killed a kid of the goats, and they dipped the coat in the blood." This coat they sent to poor old Jacob, to ask if it did not belong to Joseph, and to make him suppose that a wild beast had torn his dear boy to pieces and devoured him. "And Jacob rent his clothes, and put sackcloth upon his loins,"—that is, a very coarse cloth, of which sacks were, and still are, made; which, besides the tearing of the clothes, was a further sign of grief;—and he "mourned for his son many days."

Poor Jacob, awake or asleep, he thought he saw the wild beast seizing Joseph; he fancied he heard his shocking shrieks for

help; then he trembled at the idea of the lion drinking his innocent blood, tearing him limb from limb, and leaving nothing of him remaining. Do you not pity Jacob, and hate the cruelty and wickedness of his sons, who knew all the time that Joseph was still alive, and that they were deceiving their father, and half breaking the poor old man's heart? and yet they falsely "rose up to comfort him; but he refused to be comforted." This was wrong, because, after all, things turned out better than he expected, and we should trust in God in the worst of sorrows.





THE THIRTY-NINTH CHAPTER OF GENESIS.

Joseph in Potiphar's House.

“And the Lord was with Joseph, and he was a prosperous man; and he was in the house of his master the Egyptian.”—Ver. 2.

The story of Joseph is not continued in the next chapter, but goes on in the thirty-ninth.

Joseph was sold to Potiphar, who was captain of Pharaoh's guard.

He was a good youth, and feared God, and God so blest him, that his master took a great liking to him, and made him head servant over all his house.

But Joseph's mistress was a wicked woman, and she planned his ruin, because he would not break his master's confidence, by constantly keeping company with her, and behaving familiarly with her when his master was absent. which would have been a very wrong thing in the young man, and especially one in his situation.

And Joseph reasoned with her, as she solicited him day after day, and told her it was a liberty he ought not to take, and that as his master had put confidence in him, he ought not to break it; and he further said, “How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?”

Whenever you are tempted to break a trust put into your hands, and to wrong those who place you in situations of confidence, always remember that God sees you, and ask the same question—“How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?”

At length Potiphar's wife one day caught hold of Joseph's outer garment, and as he fled from her, not wishing to be found in company with so wicked a woman, she held the garment fast till it fell from him, and then she kept it, and showed it to Potiphar when he came home, and said to him that Joseph had come to her to mock and insult her while he was out; that this





was not to be borne from a Hebrew slave; that she had lifted up her voice and cried for some one to take him away; and that when she did so, he fled, and dropped his garment by the way, which she had kept as a proof he had been there.

This wicked lie was believed by Potiphar, and he directly threw Joseph "into the prison, a place where the king's prisoners were bound: and he was there in the prison," where they hurt his feet with fetters, and he was bound in iron. (Psalm cv. 18.)

But still "the Lord was with Joseph;" and in the prison he soon got the favour of the keeper, who trusted its affairs in his hands, and God prospered him.

THE FORTIETH CHAPTER OF GENESIS.

Joseph in Prison.

"And Pharaoh was wroth against two of his officers, against the chief of the butlers, and against the chief of the bakers.

"And he put them in ward in the house of the captain of the guard, into the prison, the place where Joseph was bound."—
Ver. 2, 3.

While Joseph was in prison, Pharaoh was displeased with two of his servants. One was his chief butler, who supplied him with wine; and the other was his chief baker, who supplied him with bread.

We do not know what was their offence, or whether they had committed it themselves, or neglected to attend to the other butlers and bakers over whom they were placed, who might have done wrong, and so for not looking after them made themselves liable to punishment. However, they were thrown into prison.

Now, no slave or common person was allowed to serve in the presence of the kings of Egypt; these chief officers were, therefore, of the most noble families, and were, on that account, put into the state prison where Joseph was.





This was the prison under the captain of the guard, who was Potiphar, who, perhaps, by this time had found out Joseph's innocence, but did not like to own he had done wrong, and to set him free. Or Potiphar might have been dead or removed, and another captain appointed in his place.

"And the captain of the guard charged Joseph with them, and he served them."

Now, after a time, when Joseph went to see them one morning, he found them both looking very dull, as if something was the matter; and on asking them why they looked so sadly, they told him they had been dreaming, and were very anxious to know what their dreams meant.

Joseph in reply said, "Do not interpretations belong to God?" that is, God only knows future events; and if your dreams mean anything, God only can tell what they mean. Then Joseph asked to know the dreams.

The chief butler said his was about a vine with three branches, which brought forth ripe grapes, and he pressed them into Pharaoh's cup for him to drink the juice, as was the custom of those times.

Now Joseph was taught by God to explain these dreams; and he told the butler that his meant that he should be restored in three days to Pharaoh's favour, and should give him his cup to drink out of as he used to do.

Joseph wanted no reward for this service, but only asked, that as he had been unjustly put into prison, he would, when restored to the king's favour, kindly speak a word to get him set at liberty.

The chief baker, finding that this was a pleasant explanation of the meaning of the butler's dream, then told his to Joseph.

He said he had dreamt that he had three white baskets on his head; and that in the one at the top he had baked meats for the king, but the birds eat them out of the basket on his head.

Joseph told him that his dream meant that in three days his head should be cut off, and he should be hung on a gibbet, and the birds should eat his flesh.

Three days after this was Pharaoh's birth-day, and what Joseph





said came to pass—the butler was restored to favour, and the baker was hung.

You may read the account at greater length in the chapter.

You will also there find that after the chief butler was restored he forgot Joseph. It is very common for people to be ungrateful for kindnesses, but it is a great disgrace to them. Do you, my dear reader, never imitate so bad an example. But though the butler forgot Joseph, Joseph's God did not forget him.

THE FORTY-FIRST CHAPTER OF GENESIS.

Joseph raised to Honour.

And Pharaoh took off his ring from his hand, and put it upon Joseph's hand, and arrayed him in vestures of fine linen, and put a gold chain about his neck;

“And he made him to ride in the second chariot which he had; and he cried before him, Bow the knee; and he made him ruler over all the land of Egypt.”—Vers. 42, 43.

Two years more passed away, and still poor Joseph remained in prison.

Then Pharaoh dreamed that seven fat kine came out of the river Nile, and fed in a meadow, and seven lean kine came after, and ate up the fat kine.

He went to sleep again, and again he had a dream; and he thought he saw seven ears of fine corn springing up from the ground, and after that sprung up seven thin ears, blasted by the hot east wind known by travellers under the name of *simoom*—a wind which, in the deserts of Arabia, often suffocates large numbers of persons who are travelling, by blowing suddenly like a flame upon them: and these thin ears ate up the full ones.

Now there were men in Egypt called magicians, or cunning men, who pretended, by thinking on the stars, to know what would happen to people; and as Pharaoh was distressed about his



PUTTING THE CUP IN BENJAMIN'S SACK



JOSEPH PROCLAIMED RULER OVER EGYPT.





dreams, he sent for some of these men to tell him what they meant, but they could not even pretend to tell anything about them.

Then the chief butler, probably hoping to get higher into favour by telling of Joseph, told him that there was a young man, a prisoner in the king's prison, who had interpreted a dream which he had when he was there, and also another of the chief baker's, and had told them what came to pass; and he would recommend him to try what he could do.

Pharaoh, glad to catch at anything to ease his mind, sent directly for Joseph; and, as soon as he saw him, without asking him who or what he was, he told *him* his dreams.

Joseph was divinely taught to see that they meant that the river Nile, which overflows the land of Egypt, and causes it every year to bring forth a harvest, should overflow it so as to produce an abundance for seven years; and then it should flow so sparingly, that there would be no water to water the sown grounds; and there should be seven years of dreadful famine, so that people would not be able to get any bread to eat.

Joseph then told Pharaoh, that he ought to find some wise man, who would lay up one-fifth part of the corn in plentiful years, and, perhaps, buy more, and keep it in store till the years of scarcity, so that the people might not starve.

Pharaoh was satisfied with what he said, and no doubt God moved the mind of the king to believe Joseph, as much as he did the mind of Joseph to explain his dreams.

Then the king thought that none could be found like Joseph, —so full of wisdom; and he appointed him ruler, next to himself, over all the land of Egypt; and he clothed him finely, and put a ring on his finger, and a gold chain round his neck; and he made him to ride in a fine state-chariot, and the people bowed to him in respect, as we in civility do to great men when we approach them.

And Pharaoh gave him a name of distinction, as our kings make dukes and lords; and he found him a wife to be his companion and comforter.

And then Joseph went out through the land, probably to build





granaries, or places to keep the corn, and find persons to look after it; as he could not do it all himself.

He was now thirty years of age, and as he was seventeen when he was sold into Egypt, he had been just thirteen years a slave.

See, my young reader, what changes there are in this world; rich people often become poor, and poor people become rich. Joseph, brought up tenderly by his father, is made a slave, and then he becomes a great man in the land of Egypt.

Happy are they, who, amidst all their changes of joy or sorrow, riches or poverty, sickness or health, life or death, have Joseph's God for their God; "For this God is our God for ever; he will be our guide even unto death."

You see that Joseph could never have come to this honour, and have done all the good he did, if he had not suffered what he did, and been sold by his brethren, and carried into Egypt and put into prison; so that God makes all things to work together for good to them that love him, though they do not always, at the time, see what good can come out of their present seeming evil.

Joseph had, by and by, two sons born to him, Manasseh and Ephraim; so that God added further to his comforts, for good children are comforts to their parents.

At length the famine came; and it was not only in Egypt, but in all the countries round about, so that the people came from them to buy corn in Egypt; and everybody looked to Joseph to be supplied with what they wanted to save them from perishing for hunger.

THE FORTY-SECOND CHAPTER OF GENESIS.

Joseph's Brethren in Egypt buying Corn.

"Now when Jacob saw that there was corn in Egypt, Jacob said unto his sons, Why do ye look one upon another?"

"And he said, Behold, I have heard that there is corn in Egypt: get you down thither, and buy for us from thence; that we may live and not die."





“And Joseph’s ten brethren went down to buy corn in Egypt.”
—Vers. 1—3.

The famine had now got into Canaan, which, it seems, was often troubled by it; and, indeed, before men learnt to know how to farm and manage the ground, which was not then studied as it is with us, famines were very common. Canaan was often troubled with them; you remember that Abraham and Isaac both went into Egypt on account of famine in Canaan; and now Jacob sends to Egypt also, having probably seen some of the corn that his neighbours had got from that country.

Famine, or want of bread, is a very dreadful thing; but, while bread is common, we do not enough thank God for his goodness in causing the earth to bring forth. In this sense we should always pray, “Give us this day our daily bread,” and we should always thank God when we eat our food. History tells us, that, in the year 272, there was so great a famine in England, that people ate the bark of trees! There was also one in Scotland, in the year 306, when thousands were starved. Again, in the year 310, forty thousand persons were starved to death in England and Wales. So late as the year 1438, the people were obliged to make bread in England of fern roots, for want of corn; and since that time there have been many severe famines in the United Kingdom. Other countries have suffered in the same way; in Italy, in the year 450, parents even ate their children! and in Vellore, in the East Indies, about thirty years ago, *six thousand* people perished for want; and *five thousand* were starved in one part of Sweden, because, owing to the cruelty of war, they could get no food.

Jacob having lost his dear son Joseph, was now exceedingly careful of his younger son Benjamin, Joseph’s very near brother, both having Rachel for their mother. He, therefore, sent down his other ten sons into Egypt, but kept Benjamin at home.

And Joseph’s brethren “came and bowed down themselves before him with their faces to the earth.” Now, my young reader, you see that Joseph’s dreams have come true. Oh the won





derful ways of God! for, if his brethren had not sold him into Egypt, to prevent the dreamer from ever being above them, this had never happened.

Joseph knew his brethren; for they having been men when he saw them twenty-one years before, had not so altered in their faces as he had, who was then a lad, but had now become a man.

And Joseph remembered his dreams, and saw the wonderful providence of God in sending him into Egypt, where he was to save the lives of his starving family as well as of the Egyptians and other people, and where his brethren's sheaves bowed to his sheaf.

And he treated them very roughly, still better to prevent them from knowing him, who was probably very meek and mild. And he charged them with being spies,—that is, with going to see how weak the people might be from want of food, and so intending to return and kill and plunder them, if all seemed to favour their plan; for the Arabs who live in those parts, even to this day, will spy out a weak town and drive out the people, and take their houses and goods, and live in it themselves.

Jacob's sons then told him who they were, to prove they were not spies; for no man would hazard the lives of ten sons on such a dangerous business, where they would lose their lives if they were found out. But they said the youngest son was left behind.

"That," said Joseph, "looks more suspicious: why was your father afraid to trust him with you, if you intended to do what was right?"

THE FORTY-SECOND CHAPTER OF GENESIS.

Joseph's Brethren sent home for Benjamin.

"If ye be true men, let one of your brethren be bound in the house of your prison: go ye, carry corn for the famine of your houses:





"But bring your youngest brother unto me ; so shall your words be verified, and ye shall not die. And they did so."—Vers. 19, 20.

Joseph then protested by the life of Pharaoh, that his brethren should not go till the youngest was brought to him. Some think, when Joseph said, "By the life of Pharaoh," that he swore by Pharaoh's name, though he would not by the sacred name of God ; but, if he did so, he had got a very bad habit, by doing what those around him did, and showed that "evil communications corrupt good manners ;" for we are thus commanded by God's holy word,—*"Swear not at all."* Others, however, think that he meant only to say, "May Pharaoh live ;" or, "As I hold Pharaoh's life dear, and will not expose him to be killed by spies, you shall not go back until I know if you speak truth." Joseph certainly seems to have feared God too much to speak any wicked words.

Joseph now told them that they must send one to fetch their youngest brother, and he would keep the rest till he returned with him ; and he put them in prison for three days to think about it. And on the third day he sent for them, and told them that he feared God, and therefore would not do them any wrong ; for people give very little proof that they fear God, whatever they may pretend to, when they do unjust things to one another. So he let them all go but one, and he kept Simeon while they took home the corn, and till they brought back Benjamin, whom, as his own brother, he secretly wanted much to see.

Now their consciences began to wound them, and they recollected how they had used Joseph ; and they talked to one another, and said, "We are verily guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the anguish of his soul when he besought us, and we would not hear ; therefore is this distress come upon us." "Ah," said Reuben, "did not I say, 'Do not sin against the child ;' and ye would not hear ?"

They, supposing Joseph to be an Egyptian, talked out loud in Hebrew ; for Joseph, to conceal himself, got another to speak for him, who was called on this account an interpreter.

When Joseph heard how their hearts were pained, he turned





aside and wept; and then, having recovered his courage, he "took from them Simeon, and bound him before their eyes."

Thus Providence put it into his power to punish the injustice and cruelty of his brethren; though you will see that after he had humbled them, he treated them very kindly, and harboured no wicked revenge in his bosom.

Joseph next ordered their money to be put into their sacks; and they went home, leaving Simeon behind.

But one of them opened his sack to feed his ass, and finding his money, he was quite frightened lest he should be sent for back as a thief.

And when they got home, they told Jacob all that had happened; and as they all emptied their sacks, they all, to their great surprise, found their money there.

And when they told Jacob that Simeon was left behind, and Benjamin must go back, the poor old man's heart was sadly grieved; and he said, "Joseph is not, and Simeon is not, and ye will take Benjamin away; all these things are against me." "My son shall not go down with you; for his brother is dead, and he is left alone: if mischief befall him by the way in the which ye go, then shall ye bring down my grey hairs with sorrow to the grave."

Reuben offered to give his sons to be put to death by Jacob if they did not bring Benjamin back; but what good would that have done to Jacob?—the death of his grandsons could not have comforted him for the death of his son.

"It is bad when children carry themselves so ill that their parents know not how to trust them." Perhaps Jacob might even suspect, that through their neglect, at least, Joseph had come to an evil end; and that they might deprive him of Benjamin, too, in their great jealousy, because he so dearly loved him.

Thus were Jacob's sons punished; and when a man does wrong towards others, God, in his providence, will make him feel for it some time or other; "For verily there is a righteous God that judgeth in the earth."

Let us, therefore, pray for grace more patiently to bear evil, when any act unkindly towards us without a cause; and leave all in His hands who is just as well as good.





THE FORTY-THIRD CHAPTER OF GENESIS.

Joseph's Brethren return to Egypt.

- ' And the famine was sore in the land.
' And it came to pass, when they had eaten up the corn which they had brought out of Egypt, their father said unto them, Go again, buy us a little food."—Vers. 1, 2.

The famine still continued; and the last supply having been eaten, Jacob wished his sons to get some more corn.

They were ready to go; but then they could not go without Benjamin. This was very hard for poor Jacob; but at last he consented, and his dear Benjamin went also.

Then Jacob sent *presents* to Joseph,—for that is the way in which the favour of great men in the East is to be gained,—and he sent back the money found in the sacks, for he knew it did not belong to him; and good people are always honest, and will never keep anything that is not their own; and he prayed to God to bless them, and sent them away.

When they got to Egypt, Joseph provided a great feast for them, and they were sadly afraid, on going to his house, lest he should do them some harm; for they always remembered that they had ill used their brother, and they thought that God was angry with them ever after, in all that they did. See what a sad thing it is to have a bad conscience—a constant feeling that we have done wrong. Their fears were, however, soon quieted; for the steward spake kindly to them, and Joseph treated them as kindly.

And now he asked after his good old father, for he was a tender-hearted son, and loved him dearly. And when he saw his own brother Benjamin, born of the same mother, his heart was so full that he was obliged to go himself into his chamber and weep.

Having washed his tears away, he returned and ordered three tables to be spread: one for himself, as a great chief above all the rest; another for his brethren, to eat by themselves; and another for the Egyptians, that they might eat by themselves,—for the





Egyptians thought it an abomination, or that it would defile them, to eat bread with the Hebrews, because the Hebrews ate for food some creatures which they were so ignorant as to worship as gods.

Then Joseph having given orders, the eldest was put at the head of the table, and the youngest at the bottom—all in order according to their ages; and they all wondered how he could know so much about them; and all this time it never came into their thoughts that he might be Joseph. Perhaps he did all this to try if they would find him out; but, as young men are greatly altered from their appearance as boys, it was not easy to know him, especially in another dress; nor could they ever suppose that he had become so great a man, whom they sold as a poor slave. And, according to the custom of the country, Benjamin had five times more food set before him than any of the rest, having a greater variety of dishes for his choice; hence we sometimes say, when any one is helped largely, he has got Benjamin's mess; not that Benjamin was a glutton, and ate more than any of the rest, but Joseph gave him this mark of honour, as it was then thought, because he was not a half brother, but his own brother, whom he greatly loved.

So seeing Joseph behaved so kindly, they drank and were merry with him.

THE FORTY-FOURTH CHAPTER OF GENESIS.

The Cup in Benjamin's Sack.

"And the cup was found in Benjamin's sack."—Ver. 12.

Joseph's brethren again prepared to depart, and Joseph ordered every man's money to be put again in his sack's mouth; and along with the money, he ordered his silver drinking-cup to be put into Benjamin's sack.

As soon as the men were gone a little way, he sent after them, and charged them with having stolen his cup. They were sure that they all knew too well what a crime it was to steal, and so





they readily agreed to be searched, and that the thief should be made prisoner. The search was then made, beginning with the eldest, and going down to the youngest; and lo, the cup was found in Benjamin's sack. Then, as was the custom in great grief, they tore their garments, and all of them went back.

When they came to Joseph, "they fell before him on the ground." And Joseph asked them if they supposed that they could cheat him? Did not they know that he was a very cunning man, and could divine or find out such things? Now, Joseph did all this to try if his brethren could yet find him out, and Providence made these plans their punishment for their cruelty to their brother. He wanted, also, to detain Benjamin, and to try if they had any affection for his brother, or if they did not care about him, as they once proved they did not love him. If so, they would say, "Let this young favourite go and be a slave in Egypt; if he have stolen the cup, let him suffer for it; we have a good riddance of him; and without being under the necessity of dealing with him as we did with his brother. And as to the old man, if he will indulge in such partial fondness, let him take the consequence."*

But Joseph had the pleasure to find that his brethren were truly sorry for what they had done. He knew they were innocent; yet they said, in remembrance of their past conduct, "God hath found out the iniquity of thy servants;" thinking that God was now reckoning with them. And at length Judah made a most beautiful and tender speech, which touched the heart of Joseph to the centre, and which we can scarcely read even now without tears. You must not pass it by without reading it, but it is too long to be given in this place; it begins at the 18th verse of the 44th chapter of Genesis, and ends at the 34th.

* Rev. A. Fuller, on Genesis.





THE FORTY-FIFTH CHAPTER OF GENESIS.

Joseph makes himself known to his Brethren.

"Then Joseph could not refrain himself before all them that stood by him ; and he cried, Cause every man to go out from me. And there stood no man with him, while Joseph made himself known unto his brethren.

"And he wept aloud : and the Egyptians and the house of Pharaoh heard."—Vers. 1, 2.

Judah's beautiful speech so overcame Joseph, that he was obliged to give way to his feelings, and to make himself known ; and having ordered every one but his brethren instantly to leave his presence, he said, "I am Joseph ; doth my father yet live ? I am Joseph your brother, whom ye sold into Egypt." No wonder they were troubled at his presence. These were cutting words, but he soon softened them and quieted their fears. "Now therefore," said he, "be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither : for God did send me before you to preserve life."

How much of kindness and goodness was here ? Joseph only wished his brethren to forgive themselves, for he had forgiven them. How he might have taken vengeance on them now, for their past scorn, hatred, and cruelty !—but his mind was too noble ; and having seen their sorrow for having done him wrong, he readily forgave them.

And now he would have his father come and live near him, and all of them. "And he fell upon his brother Benjamin's neck, and wept ; and Benjamin wept upon his neck. Moreover he kissed all his brethren, and wept upon them : and after that his brethren talked with him."

Now Pharaoh soon heard of this interesting meeting of Joseph and his brethren ; and, as he greatly respected him, he desired that what he wished should be directly done : and he ordered Egyptian wagons to be sent into Canaan, to fetch the women and children of the old man, and promised them "the good of all the land of Egypt."





And Joseph gave presents of clothes to his brethren, and a large present of clothes to his brother Benjamin; and he sent corn, and bread, and meat, for his father; and dismissed his brethren with this good advice—"See that ye fall not out by the way."

And when they got home and told their father that Joseph was yet alive, he was some time before he could believe them; but when he saw the wagons, he knew that they were not theirs, and that they could not bring them away without leave, and then he said, "It is enough;"—I am satisfied;—"Joseph my son is yet alive: I will go and see him before I die."

THE FORTY-SIXTH CHAPTER OF GENESIS.

Jacob goes into Egypt.

"And Jacob rose up from Beer-sheba: and the sons of Israel carried Jacob their father, and their little ones, and their wives, in the wagons which Pharaoh had sent to carry them.

"And they took their cattle, and their goods, which they had gotten in the land of Canaan, and came into Egypt, Jacob, and all his seed with him:

"His sons, and his sons' sons with him, his daughters, and his sons' daughters, and all his seed brought he with him into Egypt."—Vers. 5, 6, 7.

Good old Jacob wished to be guided by Providence in all he did; and before he quite made up his mind to go down into Egypt, he went to Beer-sheba, and there he worshipped God. It was in his way, and it was a favourite place, for there Abraham and Isaac had worshipped God before him. (See Genesis xxi. 33; xxvi. 35.) And there God spake in some way, which we do not know,—but we know he can do all things,—and told Jacob to go down into Egypt, and that he and his should there prosper.

So Jacob and his family went down into Egypt, being in number threescore and ten, or seventy persons.





When they were near their journey's end, Judah was sent forward to tell Joseph that they were coming; "and Joseph made ready his chariot," being a great man, "and went up to meet Israel his father, to Goshen;"—for you remember that Israel was the name given to Jacob by the angel that wrestled with him, and he "presented himself unto him: and he fell on his neck, and wept on his neck a good while."

You see that Joseph did not neglect his good old father because he was "a plain man," while he himself was become a great man in the land of Egypt. But there have been wicked children who have looked with contempt on their poor parents, after they have done all in their power to bring them up, and rewarded their kindness by the most ungrateful returns when they have become prosperous men.

Joseph not only paid respect to his aged parent by going to meet him, "but he fell on his neck, and wept on his neck a good while." How much he loved him!—what an affectionate son!

THE FORTY-SEVENTH CHAPTER OF GENESIS.

Jacob before Pharaoh.

"And Joseph brought in Jacob his father, and set him before Pharaoh; and Jacob blessed Pharaoh."—Ver. 7.

Jacob and his family having arrived in Egypt, he and five of his sons were introduced by Joseph to the king, and Joseph having told them what to say about themselves,—that they were *shepherds*,—they told Pharaoh about their employment; for though Joseph could have got them greater honours, he thought that they would be much more happy in being by themselves, than among a people that did not worship the true God.

So Pharaoh ordered Joseph to give them the best land in *Goshen* to live in, where there was pasture for their flocks; and



to make any of the most trustworthy rulers of his cattle, or chiefs over his herdsmen.



And when Jacob was introduced, he had a seat to sit down, being a very old man and feeble; for we should always be kind to old age, as we ourselves may live to be old, and then shall be glad of the same kindness from others. And Jacob blessed Pharaoh, who had been so kind to his family. This was grateful; and gratitude for any kindness is always pleasant, though some people forget to show it. Jacob's blessing was the same as if he prayed for his welfare; and the prayers of such a good old man were no small returns for Pharaoh's kindness.

And then Pharaoh asked Jacob, "How old art thou?" And Jacob said unto Pharaoh, "The days of the years of my pilgrimage





are an hundred and thirty years : few and evil have the days of the years of my life been, and have not attained unto the days of the years of the life of my fathers in the days of their pilgrimage." Jacob had lived an hundred and thirty years, and yet he thought his days few, though they had been evil, and he had suffered much from trouble ; which, when it comes, makes days appear long till it is over. Human life is then very short, and old people *know* it to be so. How important then is it that every one should often think about another life, that shall not be short, but long as Eternity ; and that shall not be evil at any time, but always happy ! Dear young reader, may the grace of God prepare you for it !

"And Joseph nourished his father, and his brethren, and all his father's household, with bread, according to their families." Thus you see how God brought good out of all the seeming evil that had happened to him.

And now the famine became very bad indeed, as Joseph, under divine direction, had foretold. And the people spent all their money to buy corn ; and when that was gone they exchanged their cattle for it ; and when that was gone, they gave their lands and themselves as servants to Pharaoh, rather than perish for want. Now Joseph was not cruel in taking their money, and cattle, and lands, and themselves ; for he had bought up the corn in his granaries with Pharaoh's money, and it was Pharaoh's corn and not his to give away. And if the people had been wise, they would have laid up corn as well as Joseph ; but as they did not fear God, they did not believe his servant ; and so this distress came upon them. And as the property he gained was the king's, Joseph made no advantage of it : he kept none for himself, but only, like a faithful servant, gave it to Pharaoh ; and then, at last, he restored the people their lands—only on condition that they would give one-fifth of its produce to Pharaoh, to help him to preserve the state,—a kind of tax, common in all eastern countries now, where a fifth or a tenth of the produce is paid to the ruler as a rent for the land.

So you see how Pharaoh prospered through Joseph, and for being kind to Jacob.



After this Jacob lived seventeen years; and finding himself growing feeble, he wished to be buried in Canaan, and persuaded Joseph to make him a solemn promise that he would take his body out of Egypt, and bury him with his fathers; for Canaan was a type or resemblance of heaven, being the land God had preserved for his peculiar people, and there he wished to rest in peace.

THE FORTY-EIGHTH AND FORTY-NINTH CHAPTERS OF GENESIS.

Jacob on his Death-bed.

“And Israel said unto Joseph, Behold, I die: but God shall be with you, and bring you again unto the land of your fathers.”
—Chap. xlviii. 21.

Jacob being about to die, Joseph went to comfort him, and to receive his blessing; and he took his two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, with him, that he might bless them also.

And Jacob laid his hands upon their heads, and blessed them; committing them to the care of God, which was the best fortune he could possibly leave them.

Then he called all his sons together, and told them, being taught by God, what should happen to them in their latter days.

After he had done, he desired to be buried in the field which Abraham had bought of Ephron the Hittite,—the same field in which Abraham and Sarah were buried, and Isaac, and Rebekah, and Leah; there they were laid in a cave prepared on purpose for the family.

“And when Jacob had made an end of commanding his sons, he gathered up his feet into the bed, and yielded up the ghost;” that is, breathed out his spirit, and was gathered unto his people.

Thus died Jacob, aged one hundred and forty-seven years. My young reader, may Jacob's God be your God, and your last end be as happy as his!





THE FIFTIETH CHAPTER OF GENESIS.

Jacob's Funeral and Joseph's Death.

- “And his sons did unto him according as he commanded them :
“For his sons carried him into the land of Canaan, and buried him in the cave of the field of Machpelah, which Abraham bought with the field for the possession of a burying-place of Ephron the Hittite, before Mamre.
“And Joseph returned into Egypt, he and his brethren, and all that went up with him to bury his father, after he had buried his father.”—Vers. 12, 13, 14.
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When Joseph saw that Jacob was dead, he “fell upon his father’s face, and wept upon him, and kissed him.” His icy cold body and his pale cheeks and lips, were yet dear to him ; and he showed how much he loved him, by bathing him with his tears. He had lost a kind and pious father, and such a friend is a loss indeed.

Jacob’s body was embalmed or preserved according to the custom, of the Egyptians who had men very skilful in embalming, though it took some time ; but the body once embalmed would not change any further for thousands of years. When embalmed it was rolled up tightly in linen cloth which had been soaked in bitumen or pitch, and generally put into a coffin of strong wood or stone, finely ornamented. Some had grand apartments prepared for them where they were kept for many generations ; so that the bodies of grandfathers and great grandfathers might be seen by their grand and great grandchildren, as perfect as if they had died only a few days. Some of these bodies, called mummies, have been taken out of ancient tombs in Egypt, where they have been buried almost from the time of Joseph, and now, after more than three thousand years, are yet perfect, and are to be seen in many of our Museums. The whole time usually taken for embalming the body, was seventy days ; and while those





JACOB BLESSING EPHRAIM AND MANASSEH.



MOSES IN THE BULRUSHES.



days lasted, the Egyptians, out of respect to Joseph as well as Jacob's family, mourned for him, just as we do when our President is dead; everybody, out of respect, goes for a time into deep mourning.

When the seventy days were over, Joseph asked Pharaoh's leave to go into Canaan, and bury his father, which Pharaoh readily granted. "And Joseph went to bury his father; and with him went up all the servants of Pharaoh, the elders," or most honourable men of his house, "and all the elders of the land of Egypt; and all the house of Joseph, and his brethren, and his father's house: only their little ones, and their flocks, and their herds, they left in the land of Goshen. And there went up with him both chariots and horsemen: and it was a very great company." Thus good old Jacob came to the honour of a national funeral, and a national mourning; only great men of all countries having such respect paid to their remains.

On their way to Canaan, the procession reached the threshing floor of Atad, beyond Jordan, where it stopped. Atad was probably the chief of that part of the country, and he had much land, and a threshing floor on which he had the corn beaten out, which floor usually stood in the middle of a field. Here there was probably pasturage for the cattle; and so here the mourners stopped, and they mourned again seven days.

"And when the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites, saw the mourning in the floor of Atad, they said, This is a grievous mourning to the Egyptians." For the Hebrews used to tear their hair, and rend their clothes, and fill the air with piercing shrieks and cries, when a dear relative was dead.

After the funeral, Joseph returned into Egypt. His brethren still feared his anger, knowing they deserved it, and supposed that he only withheld it till the death of his father, that he might not hurt the good old man's feelings. They therefore again implored Joseph's forgiveness, and pleaded that his father wished them so to do; and this might be true, for he perhaps thought they could not too much humble themselves for the wicked act of selling their own brother. Joseph then repeated his pardon, and said to them, "Fear not, for am I in the place





of God?" Ask pardon of God for your sin, but I will not take vengeance: besides, he overruled your cruelty for good. "As for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive. Now, therefore, fear ye not: I will nourish you, and your little ones. And he comforted them, and spake kindly unto them."

Joseph was a chief man in Egypt for eighty years; for he was thirty years old when he was raised to his honours, and he died at an hundred and ten years old,—being the shortest lived of all the Patriarchs. Perhaps this was partly owing to his living the life of a courtier, which was less hardy, and therefore not so healthy as that of a shepherd. However, when he died, he had great great grandchildren to remember his name with respect; and, what was better than all, he died in *faith*, believing in a joyful resurrection and a promised Messiah,—that Saviour who would come to save his people from their sins.



ANCIENT TOMB.





EXODUS.

WHICH MEANS

THE GOING OUT,

BECAUSE THIS BOOK GIVES AN ACCOUNT OF THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL,
THAT IS, OF JACOB, GOING OUT OF EGYPT.

THE FIRST CHAPTER OF EXODUS.

The Children of Israel in Bondage.

- ‘Now there arose up a new king over Egypt, which knew not Joseph.
- ‘And he said unto his people, Behold, the people of the children of Israel are more and mightier than we.
- “Come on, let us deal wisely with them; lest they multiply, and it come to pass, that, when there falleth out any war, they join also unto our enemies, and fight against us, and so get them up out of the land.
- “Therefore they did set over them task-masters to afflict them with their burdens.”—Vers. 8—10.

After the death of Joseph, and of all his brethren, and of all the people that lived in the time of his greatness, another king reigned, called also Pharaoh, that being a general name for a king.

“And the children of Israel were fruitful, and increased abundantly, and multiplied, and waxed exceedingly mighty; and the land was filled with them.”





Pharaoh was jealous on this account, and he burdened the Israelites with heavy taxes, and made them work for him at brick-making, and build his cities; and it is supposed by some that he made them build the famous pyramids, or huge monuments, which remain to this day in Egypt among the greatest wonders of the world; and he set over them task-masters, or men to overlook them and see that they kept hard at work. By so doing he kept them very poor, for they had not time to labour for themselves, and he tried to wear them out with slavery, that he might lessen their numbers; "But the more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and grew."

So the king thought upon another plan to destroy them, and ordered all the little boys of the Hebrews to be drowned in the river Nile, as soon as they were born; but the Hebrew women, to whom he gave the orders, feared to commit murder, and God blessed them for it, and protected them, so that Pharaoh did them no harm for not obeying him.

THE SECOND CHAPTER OF EXODUS.

The Birth and wonderful Preservation of Moses.

"And she called his name Moses: and she said, Because I drew him out of the water."—Ver. 10.

About this time God gave a son to a man of the house of Levi, that is, one descended from Levi, one of Joseph's brethren. This man's name was Amram; he was a son of Kohath and grandson of Levi.

Besides the love his mother had for him, as her son, she was struck with his great beauty, and she hid him for three months that she might save him from being drowned, which it is supposed that many were, notwithstanding the humane conduct of those Hebrew women who refused to do as Pharaoh told them.

At last it is thought that Pharaoh sent spies to search out for all the little Hebrew babes that were boys; and Moses's mother, when she could no longer hide him, took for him an ark of





MOSES BEFORE PHARAOH'S DAUGHTER.





bulrushes, and daubed it with slime and with pitch, and put the child therein, and she laid it in the flags by the river's brink. The ark means a boat, and the bulrushes were a sort of strong tall reed which grows on the banks of the Nile, the wood of which was tied together in little bundles, and these little bundles were again tied together, till enough were so tied as to make a boat of nearly the same shape as we could make it of wood. The slime and the pitch were to keep the water from getting into it, that it might not sink. The Egyptians made all their boats this way, till they found out a better method. Moses's mother perhaps knew the spot which Pharaoh's daughter used to visit, and might have hoped to move her to pity by his helplessness, and innocence, and beauty; and, being directed by Divine Providence, the poor little babe was put there, "and his sister, Miriam, stood afar off to wit," or observe, "what would be done to him."

"And the daughter of Pharaoh came down to wash herself," or, rather to bathe at the river, as was the custom in that hot climate, and still is in many countries; "and her maidens" that attended upon her "walked along by the river's side; and when she saw the ark," or little reed boat, "among the flags, she sent her maid to fetch it. And when she had opened it, she saw the child: and, behold, the babe wept. And she had compassion on him, and said, This is one of the Hebrews' children." How kind-hearted was Pharaoh's daughter! How lovely she looks; a princess taking pity on this poor deserted child! But those are cruel indeed that would hurt a helpless infant.

His sister drawing near, as if to see what was found, but not daring to tell whose child it was, said "to Pharaoh's daughter, Shall I go and call to thee a nurse of the Hebrew women, that she may nurse the child for thee? And Pharaoh's daughter said unto her, Go. And the maid went and called the child's mother. And Pharaoh's daughter said unto her, Take this child away, and nurse it for me, and I will give thee thy wages. And the woman took the child, and nursed it." So he was restored to his mother's bosom. "And the child grew, and she brought him unto Pharaoh's daughter, and he became her son." She called him such, and brought him up as if he had been her own. "And she





called his name Moses :” which means *drawn out*, “ and she said, Because I *drew him out of the water*. This was the meaning of Moses’s name.

How wonderful was the providence of God in saving this little child ! even if he was put by his mother by design where he was found, as being the spot where Pharaoh’s daughter went, yet it was a dangerous place ; for he might have been washed out of the flags into the river, or devoured by crocodiles, those cruel and ugly animals that abound in the Nile ; and had anything caused the delay of the princess’s visit, he might have died of hunger. And then, when she came, she would not have known Moses was there, had he been asleep instead of crying ; and who could say whether she would dare to disobey her cruel father, in preventing the murder of the child, or whether she would not have ordered poor little Moses to have been instantly drowned ? And then, further, the ready thought of his sister Miriam got him his own mother for a nurse—one who was sure to love him and take care of him.

You think all this is wonderful, and so it is. But the preservation of all little children is wonderful : little infants are always in danger. They know no better, or do not always mind as they should what is said to them, and they will play with the fire, or run near the water, or get into the way of a horse when he is running, or climb where they are likely to get a fall ; and so are in danger of being burnt, or drowned, or run over, or of breaking their little necks. It is God’s great care and goodness that keep them and you alive every day.

And now Moses, having been taken under the protection of Pharaoh’s daughter, was brought up as a prince ; and being very clever, he was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, who were at that time the most learned people in the world ; so that, both from natural talents, as well as from extraordinary divine help, he was well qualified to write the first five books of the Bible, of which books he was the author, and some have thought that he also wrote Job. History likewise reports, that he was a great general, and the New Testament says, he was mighty in words and in deeds ; and this helped to make him the leader and deliverer of the oppressed Israelites.





God early touched the heart of Moses with pity to his burthened countrymen, and he "refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God," who were his people, and whom God had promised to bless.

Profane history, so called in opposition to *sacred* history, which is found in the Bible only, tells us that the beauty of young Moses was so great, and he showed so much wit and address, that all were charmed with him, and were never satisfied with looking on him. The Princess *Thurmutis*, not having any children, adopted him, and when he was three years of age, she presented him to the king her father, telling him that she had chosen him for her son on account of his rare qualities, and could wish that he might succeed to the crown of Egypt; and at the same time she put the child into the hands of her father. The king received him into his arms, and to please his daughter, in a way of mirth, he put his diadem upon the child's head. But *Moses* presently snatched it off, and letting it fall on the ground, he trod it under foot. This was looked upon as no good sign, and a priest, who, pretended to prophecy, wished much to have him put to death, saying that Egypt could not be in safety if he lived. But many of these stories, not to be found in the Bible, are not true.

From the New Testament, Acts vii. 23, we learn that "when he was full forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his brethren, the children of Israel. And seeing one of them suffer wrong, he defended him, and avenged him that was oppressed,"—that is, he took his part,—and smote the Egyptian, and hid his body in the sand. This would have been a wicked act; but Moses was divinely taught to do this as a pledge of his smiting the armies of Egypt, and saving the Israelites from their cruel enemies; and "he supposed his brethren would have understood how that God by his hand would deliver them: but they understood not."

The next day he found two Hebrews quarrelling, and wishing to prevent them from hurting one another, he asked the one who struck the first blow, why he struck his brother. He answered with another question, "Who made thee a ruler and judge over us? Wilt thou kill me as thou didst the Egyptian yesterday?"





Moses, on hearing this, wondered how the thing was known ; but it soon came to the ears of Pharaoh, who sent in search of him, that he might have him killed. Moses, therefore, escaped into Midian, a country a great way off, beyond the Red Sea.

Moses, perhaps, wearied with his journey, sat himself down by a well, the traveller's usual place of rest, at that time, and long after.

"Now the priest of Midian had seven daughters ; and they came and drew water, and filled the troughs to water their father's flock. And the shepherds came and drove them away : " and after they had been at the trouble of drawing the water, they used it for their own flocks. This was very mean and cowardly, and would have been bad conduct towards men, but it was much worse when done towards women, whom they should rather have helped.

Moses was a brave man, who loved to defend the weak against the strong ; a just man, who loved to do that which was right ; and a good man, who delighted in doing good ; he therefore boldly "stood up and helped" the priest's daughters, and even watered their flocks.

When the young women got home, their father wondered how they returned so soon ; and they told him how kind Moses had been ; and he sent to invite him to his house, and made much of him ; and he gave him his daughter, or perhaps, grand-daughter, for his wife, for the name of the priest was Reuel, but Jethro was the name of Moses's father-in-law, and he was probably a son of Reuel's. And by-and-by, Moses had a son ; and he called his name Gershom, which means *a stranger*, "for he said, I have been a stranger in a strange land."

Moses had now lived about forty years in Midian, during all of which time his brethren, the children of Israel, were cruelly treated by the Egyptians. The law for killing their sons probably did not last long, it was so extremely cruel ; and so they continued to increase in numbers.

The king of Egypt, who made that law, had now died, but the children of Israel were still treated as slaves. They seem for a long time not to have thought of crying earnestly to God in their





troubles ; but now “ their cry came up unto God by reason of the bondage. And God heard their groaning ;” for he does hear “ the prayer of the destitute, and will not despise their prayer,” and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob ; how he promised to bless them, and the people that should spring from them, their sons, and their sons’ sons for many generations. “ And God looked upon the children of Israel,” and pitied them, “ and God had respect unto them.”

THE THIRD CHAPTER OF EXODUS.

Moses and the Burning Bush.

“ And the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush : and he looked, and, behold, the bush burned with fire, and the bush was not consumed.”—
Ver. 2.

Moses was employed as a shepherd, and he kept the flocks of Jethro, his father-in-law, the priest of Midian : and he led the flock into the desert, and came to the mountain of Horeb.

Suddenly the angel of the Lord appeared to him, all covered with glory like fire, and he was in the midst of a bush. Moses wondered how the bush could be all in flames, and yet not consumed.

But this had a meaning in it ; and it taught him, by an emblem or sign, that as that bush had the angel of the Lord shining in it, so God is in the midst of his Church or people, who are often so called ; and though they in danger may look like the bush likely to be burnt, yet they shall never be destroyed. So did the Israelites appear in Egypt, like this bush, exposed to destroying flames, and so has the Church of God often appeared since ; but God has always safely preserved it.

Moses would have gone nearer to the bush to see the wonderful sight, but the voice of God spoke from it, and calling him by





name, commanded him not to go any nearer, and to pull off his shoes as a mark of reverence, as we take off our hats in the time of divine service; for the place on which he stood was holy ground.

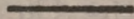
Then God told him how his poor countrymen, the Israelites, were oppressed, and that he would send him to be their deliverer, and that they should yet possess a land flowing with milk,—that is, full of fine grass for cattle, the eating of which would fill them with milk,—and full also of honey,—that is, flowers in abundance, from which the bees should gather honey more than in any other part of the world; both of which was true of Canaan.

But Moses knew that to save his people was quite out of his power, and he inquired how it could come to pass.

And God told him to go into Egypt, and to speak to the elders, or old men and chiefs of Israel, and that they should mind what he said: and that they should all go to the king of Egypt, and ask leave to go and offer sacrifices to their God in the wilderness,—a distance that would take them a journey of three days; for instead of measuring distance by miles in those times, they always measured by the time a journey took, but they did not travel near so fast as we commonly do in this country.

God also told Moses that the king of Egypt would not let them go at first, but he would make him do so; and the Egyptians should at last be glad to let them go, and even give up their gold and silver for their use, which should be a just payment for all the hard labour that they had forced the Israelites to perform, without paying them for it.

So you see, my dear reader, that though people may deal unjustly towards one another, there is a just God who will reward the oppressed at last, if they do but put their trust in Him.



MOSES' ROD TURNED INTO A SERPENT.



MOSES AND THE BURNING BUSH.





THE FOURTH CHAPTER OF EXODUS.

Moses performs Miracles, and goes with Aaron to the Israelites.

- “And the Lord said unto him, What is that in thine hand? And he said, A rod.
- “And he said, Cast it on the ground. And he cast it on the ground, and it became a serpent; and Moses fled from before it.
- “And the Lord said unto Moses, Put forth thine hand, and take it by the tail. And he put forth his hand, and caught it, and it became a rod in his hand.”—Vers. 2—4.

Moses now wanted to do some wonderful thing before the Israelites, such as could not be done by common skill, but only by the great power of God, and which we call *miracles*. These would prove that he was no impostor or cheat, and that God had really commanded him to become the deliverer of Israel, when he enabled him to do these things.

Then God commanded him to throw down a rod which he held in his hand, and it became a serpent. Then again he told him to take it up by the tail, and it became a rod. He also told him to put his hand into his bosom, and when he pulled it out it was leprous,—something like a person covered with the scurvy, or small-pox, but much worse: and then he told him to put his hand into his bosom again, and when he pulled it out it was well, although the leprosy was not a disorder that could usually be cured, but by the wonderful aid of God himself. He, indeed, blesses the means to heal all diseases, but here no means were usually of any benefit; it was therefore a *miracle*, as has been before explained.

God also told him, that if these miracles would not prove that he had sent him, he should perform more, and he should turn some of the water of the river Nile into blood.

Moses then complained that he could not speak well; but God asked him, who made his mouth? and he could make him speak well.





Still he did not like to go, till God was displeased with him for his unbelief, and he told him that Aaron his brother should speak for him.

So Moses went to his father-in-law, and asked his leave to go into Egypt; and he took his family with him, and his rod in his hand.

And God, by some secret power, impressed Aaron's mind with the thought that he must go and meet Moses.

And when Moses had told Aaron all that had happened, they went together to the elders of Israel. And when they heard all that they were told, and saw the miracles performed, they believed that God would deliver them, and they worshipped him.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER OF EXODUS.

Moses applies to Pharaoh.—Pharaoh's Obstinacy and Cruelty.

“And Pharaoh said, Who is the Lord, that I should obey his voice to let Israel go? I know not the Lord, neither will I let Israel go.”—Ver. 2.

Moses and Aaron now went to Pharaoh, and asked leave for the Israelites to go and worship in the wilderness. But Pharaoh knew nothing of the God of Israel, and he asked, “Who is the Lord, that I should obey his voice?” And he charged Moses and Aaron with making the people discontented; and he desired that their work should be heavier, and that they should make the same number of bricks as before, but instead of having straw served out to them they should get it where they could; for they used straw to make the clay of the bricks stick faster together; and some of the bricks made at that time have been found in very ancient ruins in Egypt, and are kept by those who are curious in such things, and in these are straw with the clay. So the people wandered about the corn fields to get stubble instead of good straw; and this took up so much time, that they could not make the number of bricks they were ordered to make.





Then Pharaoh ordered the Israelitish officers to be beaten, probably by striking them hard on the soles of the feet,—a cruel punishment used in Egypt, called being bastinadoed. And when they complained to Pharaoh, he said, “Ye are idle, ye are idle;” and he told them to go again to their work.

And they told Moses and Aaron how cruelly they were used, and blamed them for it: and Moses entreated the Lord in behalf of the poor Israelites.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER OF EXODUS.

Moses again commanded to go to Pharaoh.

“And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying,
“Go in, speak unto Pharaoh king of Egypt, that he let the children of Israel go out of his land.”—Vers. 10, 11.

God again encouraged Moses, and told him to tell the children of Israel what he commanded him to say—“I am the Lord, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will rid you out of their bondage, and I will redeem you with a stretched out arm, and with great judgments.”

But the poor Israelites had lost all hope, and were so low-spirited from the cruel treatment they received, that they paid no attention to what Moses said.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER OF EXODUS.

Beginning of the Ten Plagues of Egypt. The Plague of Blood.

“And I will harden Pharaoh’s heart, and multiply my signs and my wonders in the land of Egypt.”—Ver. 3.

God now permitted Pharaoh’s stubbornness and obstinacy to remain, and did not directly cut him off, that he might afterwards





show his great power over those who dare to resist his will. This is what is meant by his hardening Pharaoh's heart ; and not that he made him wicked, for God never does any wicked thing ; he is too good to do evil.

Moses was now eighty years of age, and Aaron was eighty three, when they stood before Pharaoh.

Now, as Pharaoh would require some proof of their coming from God with their demand to let the Israelites go, Moses and Aaron were desired to use their rod, which, perhaps, had been Moses's shepherd's crook for catching the sheep by the legs, and with this they were to work the miracles already done.

So when they came before Pharaoh, they did as the Lord had commanded ; and Aaron cast down his rod before Pharaoh, and before his servants, and it became a serpent.

Now Pharaoh called together his magicians, who pretended to work miracles ; and they brought rods and cast them down and they became serpents.

Perhaps God permitted them to work this miracle, that he might at last completely put them to shame, and make them own his hand in what Moses and Aaron did ; or, perhaps, what they produced seemed only to be serpents, as conjurors now play many cunning tricks of a similar kind. However, they turned their serpents again into rods, or, when the deception vanished, showed their rods in the places of the serpents : but Moses, with his divine power given him to work real miracles, was not to be mastered by these cunning magicians ; and what was most wonderful of all, his rod swallowed up their rods, as though it had been a living thing devouring others. This ought to have convinced Pharaoh that God worked by Moses ; but his heart was prejudiced against what he did, and perhaps he only thought him more clever than his magicians, and so he would not let the people go.

Then God determined to afflict Egypt with great plagues.

The first was *the plague of blood*, which lasted about seven days. The Egyptians were such stupid idolaters, that they worshipped beasts, birds, insects, and even things without life, as the river Nile, to which they sacrificed a boy or a girl every year ; probably flinging them in for the crocodiles to eat, as poor children have even





lately been sacrificed in the river Ganges in India. To show them how stupid it was, Moses was commanded to go to the river when Pharaoh went there, perhaps to bathe or to pay it some honours,—and to smite the waters with his rod, and they should become blood, and the fish should die, and the river stink, and the Egyptians nauseate the very water they were used to adore, and which is the most delicious and the most refreshing in the world. And when Moses smote the waters, all the waters in the rivers, and ponds, and even in the vessels in the houses, became blood. “And there was blood throughout all the land of Egypt.” Perhaps God here designed to punish the Egyptians for their cruelty, in having drowned so many poor helpless Hebrew infants in the Nile. The Egyptians then dug wells, and got good water, out of which it is supposed the magicians tried to work the same miracle; and it was no very difficult thing, by a little dexterity, to mix something with the smaller quantity of water which they would try, and make it nasty, and red as blood. So Pharaoh still remained obstinate, and would not let the people go.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER OF EXODUS.

The Plagues of Frogs, of Lice, of Flies.

“Then the magicians said unto Pharaoh, This is the finger of God.”—Ver. 19.

As Pharaoh would not let the people go, the Lord commanded Moses to threaten him with a *second* plague, which should be *frogs*.

There was no need that in this case new frogs should be created, for there were heaps of them in the muddy bed of the Nile, grown and in spawn; and a miracle would be plain enough to be seen, if all the young ones were brought at once to life, and the whole covered the land as Moses said.

And now what he said to Pharaoh came to pass—“And the





river shall bring forth frogs abundantly, which shall go up and come into thine house, and into thy bedchamber, and upon thy bed, and into the house of thy servants, and upon thy people, and into thine ovens, and into thy kneading troughs: and the frogs shall come up both on thee, and upon thy people, and upon all thy servants."

You will wonder, perhaps, how the frogs could get into the ovens; but the Egyptian ovens were only earthen pots sunk into the ground, into which they put their dough, and covered it with fire, and so baked it into bread. Here, when the fire was out, the frogs would easily fill the ovens.

Now, frogs are very harmless creatures; there is no need to be afraid of them: but people in general are not fond of them, and it must be very disgusting to tread upon them, and crush them at every step.

Here, also, the magicians imitated Moses and Aaron; for as there were plenty of frogs now about the land, a little skill in juggling might make them suddenly produce a few, as if they had called them from the Nile.

However, they could not get rid of those that covered the land: and Pharaoh was obliged to ask Moses to beg of God Almighty that he would remove them. Moses did so; but Pharaoh still remained obstinate, and would not let Israel go, though the miracle remained before his eyes; "and the frogs died out of the houses, out of the villages, and out of the fields. And they gathered them together upon heaps: and the land stank."

God then brought a *third plague* upon Egypt. Aaron at his command, "stretched out his hand with his rod, and smote the dust of the earth, and it became *lice* in man, and in beast; all the dust of the land became lice throughout all the land of Egypt."

The magicians tried also to imitate this plague; but God bounded their power, and they could not do it. Then they said, "This is the finger of God." Some learned men think this plague was an insect called the *tick*, which is flat and round, and is worse than the noxious vermin called lice; as it thrusts its little head and body into the flesh, and will not come out till it is torn in two, and dreadfully torments the body on which it fastens.





This plague did not answer any purpose; so a day or two after God threatened Pharaoh again: and as he would not mind it, "there came a grievous swarm of *flies* into the house of Pharaoh, and into his servants' houses, and into all the land of Egypt: the land was corrupted by reason of the swarm of flies."

God could have made these from the dust as he did the lice; but in ancient times, as in many places in the East still, people did not enough attend to cleanliness, and they threw their offals into the streets, and they became filthy, and everything was soon corrupt in a hot climate, and so bred insects in abundance. The gathering of these together under the divine control, was enough to punish Pharaoh and his people; for many persons probably died of this *fourth plague*,—being stung to death, and having their bodies inflamed and thrown into a fever by these venomous little insects, which they could not escape; for it is said in the seventy-eighth Psalm, when speaking of this plague, "He sent divers sorts of flies among them which devoured them." And this was not unjust in God, to punish the people as well as Pharaoh; for they hated and ill-treated the poor Israelites quite as much as he did.

All the time that these plagues existed, the Israelites in Goshen were free from them,—a proof that God's care was over them.

Pharaoh now offered to let the people go, but he did not wish them to go far, and he begged of Moses to pray that the flies might be removed. But when this was done, he again refused to let the people go.

THE NINTH CHAPTER OF EXODUS.

The Plagues of Murrain, of Boils and Blains, and of Rain, Hail, and Fire.

"Behold, the hand of the Lord is upon thy cattle which is in the field, upon the horses, upon the asses, upon the camels, upon the oxen, and upon the sheep."—Ver. 3.



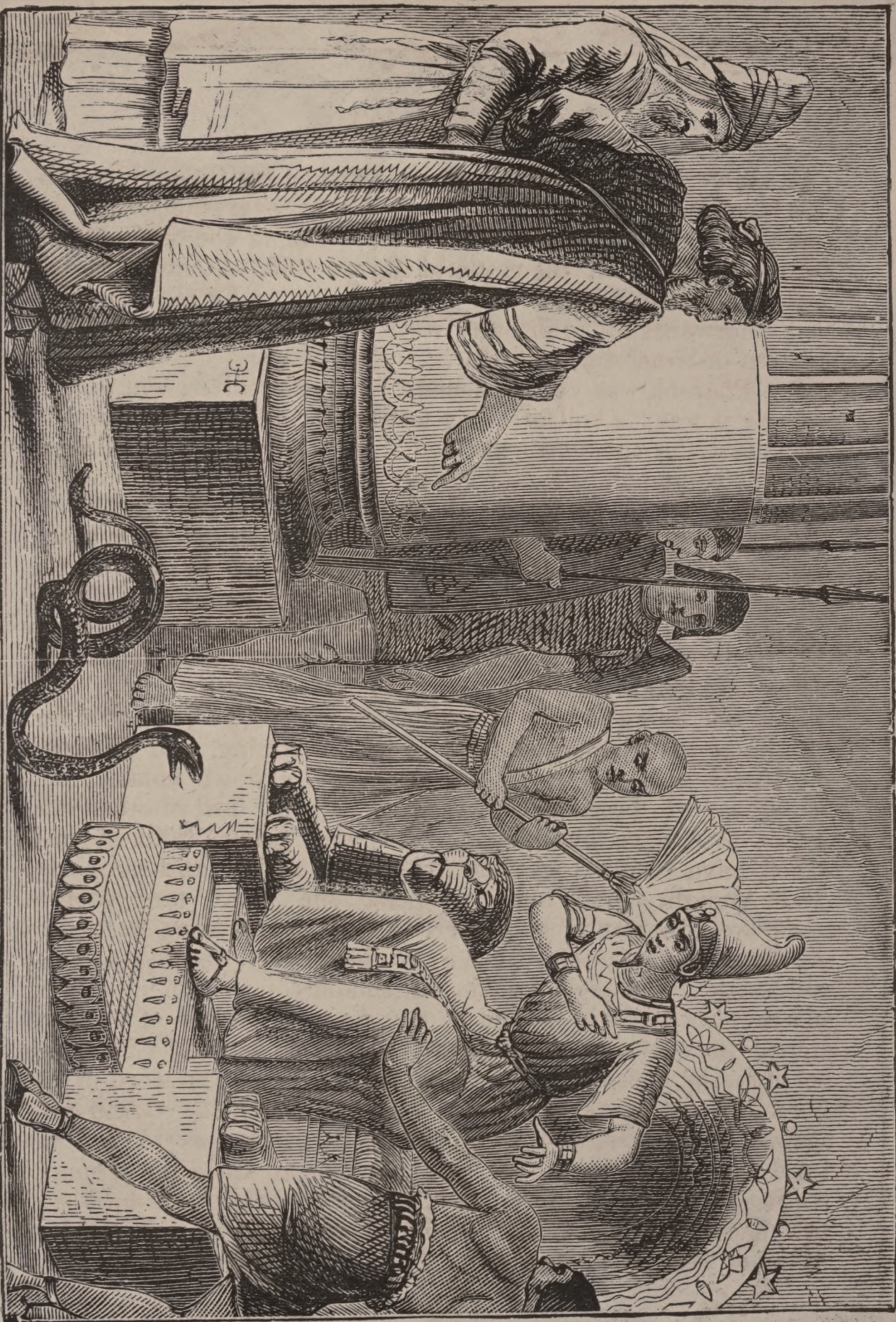


It was very foolish as well as very wicked for Pharaoh to contend against God Almighty, for he can do everything. So he sent a *fifth plague*, and caused a disease among the cattle of the Egyptians, and "all the cattle of Egypt died,"—that is, all the cattle that the disease killed were belonging to Egypt, for some were afterwards killed in other ways ;—"but of the cattle of the children of Israel died not one."

But Pharaoh was yet hardened. God, therefore, sent a *sixth plague* ; it was "a boil breaking forth with blains upon man, and upon beast, throughout all the land of Egypt." Moses and Aaron, at God's command, "took ashes of the furnace, and stood before Pharaoh ; and Moses sprinkled it up towards heaven ; and it became a boil breaking forth with blains upon man, and upon beast. And the magicians could not stand before Moses, because of the boils ; for the boil was upon the magicians and upon all the Egyptians." The ashes from the furnaces of the brick-kilns were thus turned into a righteous punishment, for the cruel treatment of the Israelites by the Egyptians.

This was followed by a *seventh plague* of hail, fire, and thunder. You know that thunder-storms are very alarming, and that they sometimes kill men and beasts, and knock down houses ; and hail-stones will break windows, and do a great deal of other mischief. We have had in our own land fearful hail storms, which have resulted in very great loss of life and property. God Almighty had but to speak the word, and such a storm would instantly be gathered. The people were warned of the danger, and cautioned not to go themselves, nor to leave out their cattle in the fields, for the hail should come down upon them and they should die. "And he that feared the word of the Lord among the servants of Pharaoh made his servants and his cattle flee into the houses : and he that regarded not the word of the Lord left his servants and his cattle in the field." And now again "Moses stretched forth his rod towards heaven : and the Lord sent thunder and hail, and the fire ran along the ground." And "all that was in the field," man and beast, and herb and tree, perished. "Only in the land of Goshen, where the children of Israel were, was there no hail."





MOSES AND AARON BEFORE PHARAOH.



THE PLAGUE OF LOCUSTS.



Pharaoh was now sadly frightened, and sent for Moses, and begged him to pray to God to stop the "mighty thunderings and hail;" but when they were over, Pharaoh again would not let the people go.

THE TENTH CHAPTER OF EXODUS.

The Plagues of Locusts and Darkness.

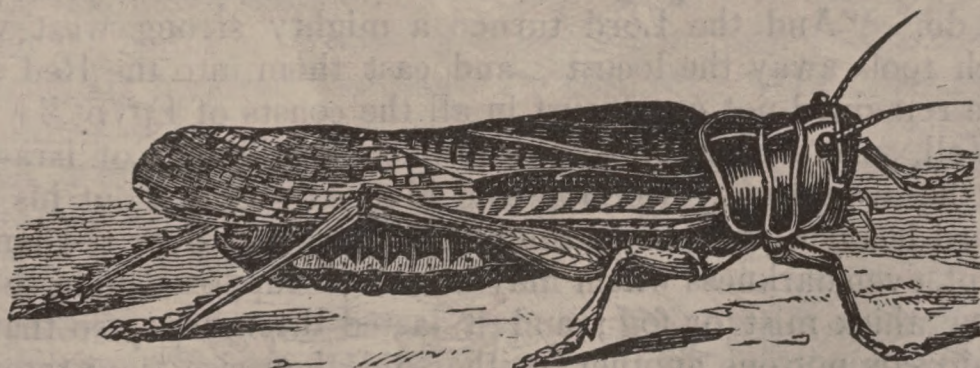
"That thou mayest tell in the ears of thy son, and of thy son's son, what things I have wrought in Egypt, and my signs which I have done among them; that ye may know how that I am the Lord."—Ver. 2.

God now threatened Pharaoh with the plague of locusts, which was the *eighth plague*.

And Pharaoh's servants tried to persuade him to let the Hebrews go; for they began to see that Moses was God's prophet, and that what he said was true.

But Pharaoh would only let the men go, without their wives and children, and flocks and herds; so that he might be sure they must soon return.

So Moses stretched out his rod, and the Lord brought a wind that brought locusts with it, and "they covered the face of the whole earth, so that the land was darkened; and they did eat every herb of the land; and all the fruit of the trees which the hail had left: and there remained not any green thing in the trees, or in the herbs of the field, through all the land of Egypt."





Perhaps you do not know what locusts are. I will tell you. They are like a large grasshopper, with wings of a green colour, and are about as thick as a man's finger, and not quite so long as his thumb. They travel in such large bodies, that they prevent the light of the sun like a cloud. Wherever they alight, they devour faster than grasshoppers; and you know that these do a great deal of injury in our fields and gardens. After a visit of locusts, the leaves of every herb and tree disappear, and look as if a fire had destroyed them. When they lay their eggs, they produce worms or caterpillars; and these are dreadfully destructive. They crawl in immense bodies or numbers united. The people try to stop them with fires, and trenches with water in them; but they march on over one another's bodies till they find a passage, and by their numbers they put out the fire and fill up the water-trenches. If many of them die, they infect the air, and produce a killing disease called a pestilence.

Well, these dreadful insects, as we have said, visited the Egyptians, and destroyed all their fields, and entered into all their houses; and it was such a visit of locusts as neither they, nor their fathers, nor their fathers' fathers, had seen.

Then Pharaoh again "called for Moses and Aaron in haste; and he said, I have sinned against the Lord your God, and against you. Now therefore forgive, I pray thee, my sin only this once, and intreat the Lord your God, that he may take away from me this death only."

As Moses was a good man, he took no pleasure in Pharaoh's punishment, and he prayed to God even for his enemy, as good men do. "And the Lord turned a mighty strong west wind, which took away the locusts, and cast them into the Red Sea; there remained not one locust in all the coasts of Egypt."

Well, surely Pharaoh would now let the children of Israel go. No; he would not. So God told Moses to stretch out his hand toward heaven, that there might be "darkness over the land of Egypt, even darkness which may be felt;" supposed to have been a very thick mist or fog; and it lasted three days, so that the people saw not one another, neither did they rise from the place where they were. They were so frightened, that they knew not





what to do; and if the darkness was caused by a damp mist or fog, it would put out every fire and every light, which, no doubt, it did. Besides, some were caught in the fields and roads, and could not find their way home; and as the wild beasts prowled about and roared, and the serpents hissed at night, they must have been dreadfully terrified. This was the *ninth plague*.

But while this plague lasted, the part where the children of Israel lived was free from it, for "all the children of Israel had light in their dwellings."

Pharaoh now offered to let the children of Israel go, if they would leave their flocks and herds behind; but how could they live without these?

And he was now in so great a rage at Moses, that he threatened to kill him, if he dared again to ask leave for the children of Israel to go.

So as he would not let them go free to sacrifice to the Lord their God in the wilderness, God would now force him, by more terrible punishments than he had yet suffered.

THE ELEVENTH AND TWELFTH CHAPTERS OF EXODUS.

Destruction of the First-born of Egypt, and Release of the Children of Israel.

"And the Lord said unto Moses, Yet will I bring one plague more upon Pharaoh and upon Egypt; afterwards he will let you go hence: when he shall let you go, he shall surely thrust you out hence altogether."—Chap. xi. 1.

"And the children of Israel journeyed from Rameses to Succoth, about six hundred thousand on foot that were men, besides children.

"And a mixed multitude went up also with them; and flocks, and herds, even very much cattle."—Chap. xii. 37, 38.

The *tenth and last plague* was about to fall upon Pharaoh, and a most terrible plague it was.

"And Moses said, Thus saith the Lord, About midnight will





go out into the midst of Egypt; and all the first-born in the land of Egypt shall die, from the first-born of Pharaoh that sitteth upon his throne, even unto the first-born of the maid-servant that is behind the mill; and all the first-born of beasts. And there shall be a great cry throughout all the land of Egypt, such as there was none like it, nor shall be like it any more. But against any of the children of Israel shall not a dog move his tongue, against man or beast: that ye may know how that the Lord doth put a difference between the Egyptians and Israel."

This plague was the most alarming of all. "And Pharaoh rose up in the night, he, and all his servants, and all the Egyptians; and there was a great cry in Egypt; for there was not a house where there was not one dead."

Only think how shocking it would be in the place where you live, if, some night, the eldest or the *chief* in every house, for that is also meant here by first-born, should be found *dead*! What gloom would appear on every face in the morning! every house and shop would be shut up, and all around would be weeping and in distress. But in Egypt, when any died, the people ran into the streets, and howled, and showed their grief in the strongest manner. What a scene of distress must there have been in the streets, when some from every house ran out and cried!

Pharaoh was now convinced that it was in vain to fight against God, and was, probably, afraid for his own life, and for the lives of all his people. So "he called for Moses and Aaron by night, and said, Rise up, and get you forth from among my people, both ye and the children of Israel; and go, serve the Lord as ye have said. Also take your flocks and your herds, as ye have said, and be gone; and bless me also. And the Egyptians were urgent upon the people, that they might send them out of the land in haste; for they said, We be all dead men."

So the children of Israel went away in so much haste, that they even carried their dough with them that was mixed for their bread, without having time to bake it. And having been cheated out of their wages for their hard labor, they borrowed, or rather *asked*, for some silver and gold from the Egyptians,—for they would not at God's command have *borrowed* without intending to pay; and





the people, glad to get rid of them, in their fright gave them jewels of silver, and jewels of gold, and raiment: "And the Lord gave the people favour in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they lent unto them such things as they required. And they spoiled the Egyptians," by obtaining from them so much money; and in this way a righteous God caused them to receive those wages for all their hard labour, which the Egyptians had withheld from them when they made them slaves.

In memory of this great event, God established what is called the **PASS-OVER**.

On the evening when the first-born were to be slain, a lamb was to be killed by each Israelitish family, who were to eat its flesh with bitter herbs, in remembrance of their bitter bondage in Egypt. The lamb's blood was ordered to be sprinkled on the lintel of each door, or that part which is over our heads when we enter; and also on the door-posts; and when the destroying angel, or the stroke of death, should visit the Egyptians, not a single injury should happen to those whose doors were so sprinkled.

This *Pass-over*, as it was called, because in that night God's wrath should *pass over* the houses of the Israelites, was also to show how those should escape Divine wrath who should by faith be sprinkled, as it were, with the blood of Jesus Christ, who is called "The Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world;" or, in other words, "Whoever believes in Him who shed his blood that sinners might not die for ever, shall never perish, but have eternal life."

THE THIRTEENTH AND FOURTEENTH CHAPTERS OF EXODUS.

The Departure of the Children of Israel from Egypt, and the Drowning of Pharaoh and his Army in the Red Sea.

"And the Lord went before them by day in a pillar of cloud, to lead them by the way; and by night in a pillar of fire, to give them light; to go by day and night."—Chap. xiii. 21.

And now the children of Israel set off to leave Egypt. There were six hundred thousand *men* on foot, and with the Levites,





who were not reckoned in that number, and also their wives and children, it is supposed the whole were above *three millions*. This was indeed a large body.

And as they were commanded to travel in the wilderness, a wild and dreary place, where they might lose their way, and fall into the hands of enemies, they were guided by a cloud in the air, which was of the shape of a pillar, and which at night was light on their side, but dark on the other.

By this cloud they were guided, when Pharaoh repented of letting them go, and said, "Why have we done this, that we have let Israel go from serving us? And he made ready his chariot, and took his people with him, and he took six hundred thousand chariots, and all the chariots of Egypt, and captains over every one of them;" "and he pursued after the children of Israel." And he overtook them encamping, or resting in their tents, by the sea. On both sides were mountains and strong towers, so that, with his army behind them, they had no way of escape, but through the sea; and how could they get through the sea without ships, while they had not so much as even a boat with them?

Pharaoh now thought that they were "entangled in the land," and that "the wilderness had shut them in."

The children of Israel, too, were alarmed, and forgot what great things God had done for them, and they began to cry out against Moses, and to say to him, "Because there were no graves in Egypt, hast thou taken us away to die in the wilderness?" "It had been better for us to serve the Egyptians, than that we should die in the wilderness."

Moses had more faith in God, and he said, "Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord, which he will show to you to-day; for the Egyptians whom ye have seen to-day, ye shall see them again no more for ever. The Lord shall fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace." Why, to be sure, the same God that had wrought all the miracles for them in Egypt, to oblige Pharaoh to let them go, could now prevent him from taking them again.

And Now God ordered Moses to lift up his rod, and stretch his hand out to the sea, and the children of Israel should "go on dry ground through the midst of the sea."





The cloud began to move, and the children of Israel were commanded to go forward. And the cloud came between the camp of Egyptians and the camp of Israel; and it was a cloud of darkness to the Egyptians, but it gave light by night to the Israelites; so that the one came not near to the other all night. And the Lord caused the sea to go back by a strong east wind all that night, and made the sea dry land, and the waters were divided.

This was in one sense, a miracle; that is, it was different from the ordinary course of events, and it was ordered by God at this particular time for the deliverance of his people, and the destruction of the Egyptians; but there is no need of making it greater than it really was. It is generally thought that this crossing took place near the present town of Suez, at the north end of the Gulf of Suez, which formerly extended further than now. This Gulf is shallow, not more than twelve or fifteen feet deep, and the east or rather south wind, under God's command, might well make it dry enough for the Israelites to pass over, as the distance across was probably not more than five or six miles.

"And the Egyptians pursued, and went in after them to the midst of the sea, even all Pharaoh's horses, his chariots, and his horsemen."

Most likely Pharaoh went on in the dark, and did not know where he was before he found out his danger. "And it came to pass that in the morning watch," which was from about three o'clock in the morning till six, when the watchmen on the towers were changed, "the Lord looked upon the host of the Egyptians through the pillar of fire and of cloud, and troubled the host of the Egyptians." Probably a storm gathered in the cloud, and it might thunder and lighten; for in the Psalms it is said, when this deliverance is named, "The voice of thy THUNDER was in the heavens, the LIGHTNINGS LIGHTENED the world, the earth TREMBLED and SHOOK." —(See the 77th Psalm.) And the Lord "took off their chariot-wheels, that they drave them heavily:" for by the storm he so terrified the drivers, that they, perhaps, ran against one another, and broke each other's chariots to pieces; and, besides, the bottom of the sea might again become wet and heavy,





so that the chariots could not go forward without violent dragging and breaking.

And now the Egyptians saw their danger, and said, "Let us flee from the face of Israel : for the Lord fighteth for them against the Egyptians."

At this moment God commanded Moses again to stretch his hand over the sea, and the waters should return : and he did so, and all the army of Egypt was drowned.

God could have done all this without Moses using his rod, but he would by this teach him to obey his commands, and then all would be well with him, and he would have Israel respect him as his servant and their leader.

The morning showed a most fearful sight, for the shores were strewn with dead bodies and wrecks : there remained not so much as one Egyptian.

"Thus the Lord saved Israel that day out of the hand of the Egyptians ; and Israel saw the Egyptians dead upon the sea-shore. And Israel saw that great work which the Lord did upon the Egyptians ; and the people feared the Lord, and believed the Lord, and his servant Moses."



THE FIFTEENTH CHAPTER OF EXODUS.

Moses's Song.

"Then sang Moses and the children of Israel this song unto the Lord."—Ver. 1.

It was very usual in old time, after great victories, to sing some song of joy, and Moses now composed a song of praise to God. "And Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took a timbrel in her hand; and all the women went out after her with timbrels and with dances." And these joined in the chorus, "Sing ye to the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously: the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea."

As my young readers may like this song in verse, I have thrown it into that form, and hope they will try and understand it, because poetry is not quite so easy to understand as prose; but some of the most difficult words are marked, and the same mark at the bottom of the page explains their meaning.

THE SONG OF MOSES AND ISRAEL.

(Exodus xv. 1—21.)

I will sing to God Most High,
He hath triumphed gloriously;
Horse and rider find their grave
Buried in the stormy wave.

In the Lord my heart is strong;
Him I honour in my song;
Mighty dangers press'd me round,
Here my soul salvation found.





For my God this heart of mine
Sacred be, a living shrine ; *
Him my fathers lov'd to praise ;
He shall have my loftiest lays. †

In his fiery gilded car
See him ride—a man of war ;
Let his foemen ‡ read his name,
Dazzling, writ in furious flame.

Chariots now, nor martial § hosts,
Egypt's haughty nation boasts,—
Prince and warriors renown'd
In the avenging sea are drown'd.

In the ocean's deepest gloom
They have found a hidden tomb ;
As the rock that bounds its wave,
Falling,—sinks,—they found a grave.

Thy right hand in that dread day,
Glorious Lord ! resum'd its sway ;
Thy right hand's resistless blow
Crush'd the proud presumptuous foe.

In thy majesty and might
Thou hast foil'd || them in the fight ;
As the lightning glanc'd thine ire, ¶
They were chaff before its fire.

At thy breath, the spreading deep
Gather'd in a liquid heap ;
And as frozen walls arose,
Us to guard, and whelm our foes.

* Shrine means a case which holds something sacred.

† A lay is another word for a song.

‡ Foemen signifies fighting enemies.

§ Martial means warlike.

|| Foiled them, means beaten them off, or defeated them.

¶ Ire means great anger, or wrath.





Then th' Egyptian, in his pride,
"Vengeance! Vengeance!" madly cried;
Now reward the soldier's toil—
Now pursue, divide the spoil.

Now amidst the o'erwhelming flood,
Let us haste to shed their blood—
Haste till vengeance hath its fill,
Draw the sword, nor cease to kill.

Then the winds their power deride,
Dash them in the foaming tide;
Shrouded † in the waves they sleep,
Sunk, like lead, beneath the deep.

Egypt's gods ‡ before thee fall;
Glorious, holy Lord of all!
Terrible art thou in praise,
Wondrous in thy works and ways!

Thou did'st wave thy ruling hand—
Earth obey'd the high command,
Like a monster gulp'd its prey
Hastening o'er the sandy way. ||

But the people of thy care
Found redeeming mercy there;
Thou hast brought the honour'd race
To a lasting dwelling place.

When the tribes of Canaan hear,
Iron hearts shall melt with fear,
Edom's chieftains ¶ stand aghast,
Moab's shake as with a blast.

† Egypt's *idols*, or false gods
|| The *sandy way*, the bottom of the sea.

† *Shrouded* means *covered*.

¶ That is, *captains*.





Thus shall smite them fear and dread,
As thy vast exploits shall spread ;
Giant hearts are petrified *
When the wat'ry paths divide.

Led by thine Almighty hand,
We shall gain the promis'd land ;
Grow, implanted by thy grace,
In thine hallow'd dwelling place.

He, the mighty Lord, shall reign,
And his empire wide retain ;
Reign when time itself shall die,
Seated on eternity !

Pharaoh's horse and men of might,
Perish'd in that dreadful night ;
God o'erwhelm'd him with his sea,
Sav'd his people gloriously.

CHORUS.

Miriam and the Women.

Sing ye to the Lord Most High,
He hath triumph'd gloriously ;
Horse and rider find their grave
Buried in the stormy wave.

You would have supposed, that after so great a proof of the care which God Almighty took of the Israelites, they never would have murmured any more at Moses, as if he had used them ill in taking them away from their slavery in Egypt. But Israel were a very dissatisfied kind of people, and they tried the patience even of Moses, who was the meekest man in the world, and so not easily

* *Petrified means turned to stone, that is, made cold, or become dead.*





made angry; and they provoked God to anger against them by their perverse dispositions. Not that God is ever provoked as we are, for we sin when we are in a passion; but when God threatened to treat Israel as we do people against whom we are provoked, then he was called so.

In a little time the Israelites came to a place called Marah. "And when they came to Marah, they could not drink of the waters of Marah, for they were bitter: therefore the name of it was called Marah," which means *bitter*. "And the people murmured against Moses, saying, What shall we drink? And he cried unto the Lord; and the Lord showed him a tree, which when he had cast into the waters, the waters were made sweet."

THE SIXTEENTH CHAPTER OF EXODUS.

The Israelites fed with Manna.

"And the children of Israel did eat manna forty years, until they came to a land inhabited; they did eat manna until they came unto the borders of the land of Canaan."—Ver. 35.

Well, surely the children of Israel must have done complaining now. Who would not trust in such a God as the God of Israel? No, they have not done yet; Moses relates more about their discontent. You, perhaps, say within yourself, "Well, I would not have done so." But, my dear reader, you do not know what you would have done had you been in the wilderness with them. You have a deceitful heart, and people now often mistrust Providence when he is good to them, and taking care of them every day. Learn to trust in the Almighty God, and he will not forsake you, if you pray to him from the heart. "Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses."

But Israel seemed unwilling to trust God for their daily bread; and when their supply ran short after leaving Egypt, they began to be angry at Moses again. And they said to Moses and Aaron,





"Would to God we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the flesh pots;" where, probably, their food as slaves was cooked in a large quantity, under the eyes of their task-masters; "and," they added, "when we did eat bread to the full; for ye have brought us forth into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger."

And do you not wonder that Moses could bear all this quietly, when so much had been done for Israel, or rather that God should still spare and not destroy them? God is indeed long-suffering, and instead of punishing the ungrateful people, he said unto Moses, "Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you; and the people shall go out and gather a certain rate every day, that I may prove them, whether they will walk in my law or no."

So in the evening God used to cause a great quantity of a bird called a quail, something like a partridge, to cover the camp, which the Israelites caught; and in the morning a white-looking small thing, as small as hoar frost, covered the ground when the dew had left it. This food was more wonderful than the regular coming of large flights of quails. The people had never seen anything like it, and they cried out—*Man hu?* what is this? from which some think it got the name *manna*; though others suppose it means *a portion*, as there was a Hebrew word like it with this meaning. Every one who was able was to gather this food before the sun had risen, or it would be melted; and when it was put into one heap, it was divided among the people, allowing an *omer*, which was about *three quarts* for each person's use for the day. This was put into a mortar and bruised, or ground in a mill, and then made into bread. God caused this to fall six days in the week; but on the sixth day, they were to gather for two days, as they were not to expect any on the Sabbath; for on that day they were to do no manner of work; and though it bred worms, and was unfit to eat, if kept for two days at any other time, yet it was always good on the Sabbath.

It is reckoned that the Hebrew camp wanted not less than ninety-four thousand four hundred and sixty-six bushels of this food every day; and that in the whole of the forty years that they were travelling about in the wilderness, they must have consumed





one thousand three hundred and seventy million two hundred and three thousand six hundred bushels !

In remembrance of this miracle, the Lord commanded Moses to fill an *omer* measure of it, which I just told you was about three quarts, and to keep it in a pot for future generations ; that is, the children and children's children of Israel, from one hundred years to another,—that they might see the bread with which God fed them in the wilderness when he brought them forth out of the land of Egypt. This was laid up in the ark ; and its preservation was another miracle, as, without that, it would have bred worms, and become corrupt as the rest when kept.

God provided thus *from day to day*, to teach Israel to look to him for their daily bread, and, in like manner, we must look and ask for ours from God ; for he could soon, if he pleased, make us so poor that we could buy no bread, and so weak that we could not labour for any.

This manna coming down from heaven to keep Israel alive, reminds us that Jesus Christ came down from heaven, who is the bread of life ; and that whoever, by faith, looks to him for salvation, believing that he is both able and willing to save his soul for ever, shall not perish, but have eternal life.

THE SEVENTEENTH CHAPTER OF EXODUS.

Moses smites the Rock—Israel defeats the Amalekites.

“ And the Lord said unto Moses, Go on before the people, and take with thee of the elders of Israel ; and thy rod, wherewith thou smotest the river, take in thine hand, and go.

“ Behold, I will stand before thee there upon the rock in Horeb ; and thou shalt smite the rock, and there shall come water out of it, that the people may drink. And Moses did so in the sight of the elders of Israel,

“ And Joshua discomfited Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword.”—Vers. 5, 6, 13.





When shall we hear the last of Israel's murmurings? Here they are murmuring again at a place called Rephidim. They wanted water, and chided Moses, and said, "Give us water, that we may drink." "Wherefore is this that thou hast brought us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our cattle with thirst?"

Was not this very provoking, after all that had been done for them? Well, a patient God still bore with them, and ordered Moses to take his rod and smite the rock in Horeb; and to show them that it was a miracle, water should instantly gush out from this hard rock. "And Moses did so in the sight of the elders of Israel."

The truth of this history is supposed by some, even to be proved now by a sight of the rock; for travellers inform us that there are holes and channels in a rock which is shown, through which water has rushed out; and that no art of man could have made them; some, however, suspect that artful persons have made them, to get money by showing the rock. So many parts of this history are proved to be correct, that there is no need of our now seeing the rock to help us to believe the story here told. We believe that God could and did bring the water out of the rock when struck by Moses.

The Apostle Paul says, "This rock was Christ:" he does not mean Christ himself, but that it resembled Christ, who, as he lives for ever, is sometimes called a *Rock*, as a rock is one of the most lasting things in the world; and it is from him flows all true happiness, which is, to the mind or soul of man, as refreshing as the streams of water were, flowing from the rock to the Israelites in the wilderness. Read the seventh chapter of John and the thirty-seventh verse.

The Israelites had now a real cause of trouble; for a people, called the Amalekites, came upon them in the wilderness, intending to kill them, and rob them of all their cattle and whatever else they had got. But again God appeared to save them. Joshua was a brave man, and Moses desired him to choose out men, and go out and fight with King Amalek. And Moses, and Aaron, and Hur, went up to the top of a hill; and there Moses held up





the rod of God in his hand, and no doubt prayed to God that he would save Israel from their enemies. And when his hands grew tired with holding them up, then Aaron and Hur supported them; "and Joshua discomfited Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword."

Probably the arms cast ashore from the Red Sea, after the Egyptians were drowned, were those which were used to beat off the Amalekites; and if so, God overruled the wickedness of one enemy to prevent that of another. Oh, it is a good thing to have God for our protection! Let us only put our trust in him, and we shall never be ashamed, nor confounded.

This was a cruel and unjust attack of Amalek upon the Israelites, who he, perhaps, thought were too weak to defend themselves, and weary, and hungry, and thirsty, which they would have been, if God had not so wonderfully provided for them. But God punished them by their shameful defeat; and he also swore that he would have war with Amalek from generation to generation, and that he would "utterly put out the remembrance of Amalek." When it is said God hath *sworn*, it means that he speaks very solemnly, and with a fixed resolution; and it always deserves particular notice, for it relates to something very important. And in the fifteenth chapter of the first book of Samuel you will read of the fulfilment of this threat, when the Amalekites having become so wicked, that they were a curse to the earth on which they lived, God told King Saul to "go and utterly destroy the SINNERS, the Amalekites."

Pray to God, my dear reader, that you may never, by unrepented sin, make him your enemy, and that his threatenings against sinners may not be executed against you.





THE NINETEENTH AND TWENTIETH CHAPTERS OF EXODUS.

The Giving of the Law.

“And mount Sinai was altogether on a smoke, because the Lord descended upon it in fire : and the smoke thereof ascended as the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mount quaked greatly.”
—Chap. xix. 18.

We pass over the eighteenth chapter, which gives an account of a visit of Jethro to Moses, his son-in-law, with some good advice which he gave him for governing the people.

About three months after God had delivered his people from the tyrant Pharaoh, he spake to Moses, and desired him to remind them of the great favours he had bestowed upon them ; and to tell them that if they would obey his voice, and keep his covenant or agreement that he would make with them, then he would always do them good, and he would keep them with as much care as a man would keep his treasures of silver and gold, and they should be a particular nation sacred to his service.

Moses told the Israelites what God had said to him. “And all the people answered together, and said, All that the Lord hath spoken we will do.”

Then Moses having returned the words of the people unto the Lord, he was ordered to warn them to be ready by holy and solemn preparation, such as washing their clothes, as a sign of putting off everything that was impure, and in three days he would come down and show his glory in the sight of all of them upon mount Sinai, which is a mountain in Arabia.

He also ordered Moses to set bounds to keep the people from going too near to the foot of the mountain ; as every one who touched even its borders should die.

“And it came to pass on the third day in the morning, that there were thunders and lightnings, and a thick cloud upon the mount, and the voice of the trumpet exceeding loud ; so that all the people that was in the camp trembled.” “And mount Sinai







THE DESTRUCTION OF PHARAOH AND HIS HOST.



was altogether on a smoke, because the Lord descended upon it in fire : and the smoke thereof ascended as the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mount quaked greatly."

And God spake all the words of his commandments, and from the mount they were heard by all the people.

These commandments are *ten* in number. I hope you have learnt them, and know them, so that I need not repeat them here ; and as they are all for the good of mankind, pray to God to write them in your heart as well as your memory.

I shall only tell you what each commandment means, and you can read the whole in the twentieth chapter of Exodus.

The *first* is against idolatry, and teaches us to love nothing more than God.

The *second* is against worshipping images for God ; and though you are better taught, millions in other countries still do this ; oh, pity them and pray for them, and help to save them from their heathen state.

The *third* is against cursing and swearing—a vulgar as well as a wicked practice.

The *fourth* is against *Sabbath-breaking*, and *idleness* in the other days of the week : and by it we learn that God is highly displeased if we work, or play, or do anything contrary to the holiness of the Sabbath while it lasts ; but during six days we are to labour, and not give up ourselves to idleness, for those who will not work ought not to eat. Even if God has given us enough to find us comforts without labour, we ought to employ ourselves in doing some good for mankind ; it will prevent us from doing evil ;

" For Satan finds some mischief still
For idle hands to do."

The *fifth* is against disrespect and disobedience to parents. If they are even wicked, and do not serve God, you must not treat them with any want of respect ; though you are not, then, to do wickedly if they tell you, because God is above your parents, and you must first of all obey him. But I hope your parents love and serve God, and teach you to worship him ; and if so, you ought doubly to love them, and to do everything to please them and to make them happy ; and this will please God.





The *sixth* is against murder : and as God looks at the heart, and murder mostly begins in anger, let us beware of being angry ; for the Bible tells us that even *he that HATETH his brother is a murderer*.

The *seventh* is against everything that is indecent in word or behaviour.

The *eighth* is against *stealing* and *cheating*.

The *ninth* forbids false stories about our neighbours, and tending to do them harm, by making people think badly of them. I am sorry to say there are many people, that pretend to be religious, who often break this commandment ; but it is very wicked, and God will punish them for it if they do not repent.

The *tenth* commandment is against covetousness, or desiring what does not belong to us ; and that is a sin that will make us unhappy with all the good things God may give us, and put us in danger of trying bad ways to get at what belongs to other people.

THE TWENTY-FIRST, TWENTY-SECOND, AND TWENTY-THIRD CHAPTERS
OF EXODUS.

Laws given to the Israelites by Moses.

“ Now these are the judgments [or laws] which thou shalt set before them.”—Chap. xxi. 1.

In these chapters there are a great many things which children cannot understand, and which will not, at present, be particularly interesting to you. But when you grow older, you will both understand and value them. But there are some verses that you may do well to remember, and that you can understand. I will mention them. They are Laws which God told Moses to command the Israelites to keep.

“ And he that smiteth his father, or his mother, shall surely be put to death.”

“ And he that curseth his father, or his mother, shall surely be put to death.”

This was God's own law given to the Jews, and it tells you and me how much children ought to respect their parents, when disobedience was, in old times, to be punished with death.





“And he that stealeth a man and selleth him, or if he be found in his hand, he shall surely be put to death.”

From this we learn, that all *Slave-dealers* are bad men, and do that which is cruel and wicked, when they buy and sell the poor blacks to work as slaves.

Then there are laws which God gave to the Jews against people hurting one another, and when they did so, ordering them to make amends; and this we should always do if we have unjustly injured another: to neglect to do so is very wicked.

“If thou meet thine enemy's ox or his ass going astray, thou shalt surely bring it back to him again. If thou see the ass of him that hateth thee lying under his burden, and wouldest forbear to help him, thou shalt surely help with him.”

This would be kind to the poor animals, for if their master had offended any one, this was not their fault that they should be punished. Besides, it would help to show a forgiving spirit, and this we should try and cherish.

These chapters, too, give some lessons about being kind to the poor, which we should always be; for we may be poor ourselves some day, though we may be rich now, and then we shall be glad to have kindness shown to us; besides, it shows a good disposition to feel compassion for the poor and needy; and it makes us like that kind Saviour, “who though he was rich, for our sakes became poor, that we through his poverty might be made rich.”

In these chapters we have also some commands given to the Hebrews to keep several feasts.

In the twenty-third chapter, and the fourteenth and following verses, God commands the Hebrews, “Three times thou shalt keep a feast unto me in the year.”

The first feast was the feast of *unleavened bread*, or the *PASS-OVER*, to remind them of their great deliverance out of Egypt. Then they were to kill a Lamb, and feast on it; to call to mind how God saved them by the sprinkling of the blood of a Lamb on their door-posts, on the night when he slew all the first-born in Egypt; and pious men would, by faith, look for salvation in Jesus Christ, who is called the “Lamb of God,” when God shall destroy the wicked world in the last day. Part of the time of this feast





they were to eat unleavened bread, as they did when they escaped from Egypt. The first day was, indeed, properly the Passover, and seven days following, the feast of unleavened bread. I have before told you something about this; this bread not being pleasant to the taste, was to remind the Israelites how bitter was their bondage in Egypt when God delivered them. You know we keep days in memory of particular events. For instance, we celebrate the Fourth of July, or Independence day, as it is called, being the day when this country was declared free from the rule of Great Britain. The ringing of bells, firing of cannon, torpedoes, and Chinese crackers, etc., etc., are all intended as an expression of joy that our nation has obtained its freedom, and could henceforth act for itself. This was a great event for us, but not greater than the deliverance of the people of Israel from the cruel bondage in which they were so long held by the Egyptians; and as God had wrought such signs and wonders in their behalf, they had good reason for keeping the Passover as a constant reminder of his exceeding great goodness.

When this feast was kept, the children would often ask what it meant, and they were answered, "Children, we were all servants, like this maid-servant, or this man-servant who waiteth"—pointing to some servant in the family,—“and on this night, many years ago, the Lord redeemed us and brought us to liberty;” and he who sat at the head of the table returned thanks, and said, “Blessed be thou, O Lord our God, King everlasting, who hast redeemed us, and redeemed our fathers out of Egypt, and brought us to this night to eat unleavened bread and bitter herbs.”

Another yearly feast of the Hebrews was the *Feast of Harvest*, sometimes called the *Feast of Weeks*, but better known by the name of *The Feast of Pentecost*. The Jews then offered thanks to God for the bounties of the harvest, in bread baked of the new corn. On that day, too, they celebrated the giving of the Law on Mount Sinai. This feast was kept fifty days after the Passover.

The feast of Pentecost has a great interest for us as being the time when the Holy Spirit descended upon the disciples of Jesus Christ, to bless all his sincere followers. Of this you will learn more before you come to the end of this work.





The Feast of Tabernacles was the third great feast. This was sometimes called *The Feast of Tents* and *The Feast of the Ingathering*. This feast was to call to memory the way in which Israel lived when God protected them in the wilderness, in moveable tents or tabernacles, something like what you see put up sometimes in gardens, to screen people from wet and heat, or in fields at fairs, or reviews. This feast, like the Passover, lasted for a week, during which time the people all lived in booths or arbours, made of the boughs of goodly trees, branches of palm trees, and the boughs of thick trees, and willows of the brook. This feast, being at the close of harvest, was also a yearly thanksgiving for God's goodness in giving them an opportunity of getting it in.

These feasts were not kept riotously, but with religious worship and reverence.

THE TWENTY-FOURTH, TWENTY-FIFTH, TWENTY-SIXTH, TWENTY-SEVENTH, TWENTY-EIGHTH, TWENTY-NINTH, THIRTIETH, AND THIRTY-FIRST CHAPTERS OF EXODUS.

The Tabernacle, its Furniture, and Priests.

"And let them make me a sanctuary; that I may dwell among them.

"According to all that I show thee, after the pattern of the tabernacle, and the pattern of all the instruments thereof, even so shall ye make it."—Chap. xxv. 8, 9.

Moses told all the people the laws of God, and they promised, "all the words which the Lord hath said we will do." And Moses wrote down all the words in a book, called the book of the covenant or agreement, and he made offerings to God, and he took of the blood of the sacrifices and sprinkled on the people, which was an understood sign that they solemnly engaged to keep their promise to God, and that if they did so, God would do everything for their good.

After this, Moses and Aaron, and Aaron's sons, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel, went up Mount Sinai, and the glory of God shone very brightly about them. And God





commanded Moses to go up into the mountain, and he would give him the commandments written on stone. So Moses went up into the mount, and he was there forty days and forty nights. All this time he neither ate nor drank, but God kept him alive. If you ask how could he live without meat and drink, I reply, that God who keeps us all alive by means of food, was able to keep Moses alive without food; he who breathed into man the breath of life, could find no difficulty in sustaining it in any way he pleased.

God now showed Moses the pattern by which he was to make a *Tabernacle* in the wilderness, in which to worship him. This was to differ from the temple which was afterwards built in Canaan, as the tabernacle was a kind of very grand tent, to move about from place to place as the Israelites moved; but the temple was a fixed building, like any one of our churches.

For the building of the Tabernacle, and the making of different articles to be used in it, the people were to give gold, and silver, and brass: and fine linen of blue, purple, and scarlet colours, and skins of animals, and wood; and also oil, and spices for making incense; and precious stones to be worn by the High Priest.

The people brought their offerings in the most liberal manner; and Moses soon got more money and things than he wanted, so that he was obliged to restrain them from giving him anything more.

The value of the gold and silver only which was used for the work, was equal to *nine hundred and twelve thousand, eight hundred and forty dollars* of our money!

The Tabernacle was long and narrow. Its length was about fifty-five feet, its breadth ten, and its height ten, that is, about twice as high as a man. Its two sides, and one end, were made of a very durable wood, called Shittim-wood; and they were overlaid with thin plates of gold, and fixed in solid sockets of silver. At the top of the sides were rings of gold; and bars of wood overlaid with gold, run through these rings at each side, and held the boards upright. At the entrance were five pillars of the same wood, ornamented with gold, and fixed in sockets of brass. A richly-worked curtain hung on these pillars.

For its ceiling, there was a covering of fine linen, magnificently embroidered or worked in needle-work, with figures called





cherubim, which it is not easy to explain. The colours of the work were blue, purple, and scarlet. On this ceiling was laid an outside covering, made of goats' hair; then upon that another covering of rams' skins, dyed red; and a fourth covering was outside to bear the weather; this was made of some other skins.

This Tabernacle was divided into two apartments. The partition was made by four pillars of the same wood as the rest, and overlaid with gold: and these stood in sockets of silver put in the ground, and on these pillars was hung a veil or curtain richly worked.

One part, at the further end, was for the *Most Holy Place*, where the people could not enter, but only the priest; and the part as large again as that, remained for the people.

This Tabernacle stood in a large court, surrounded with pillars of brass, ornamented with silver; and all around there hung upon them curtains of fine twined white linen yarn, with cords to draw them up when necessary.

Within this square stood an altar for offering burnt-offerings, or offerings in which the animals offered were burnt, and there was also a laver for holding water, for the priests to wash themselves.

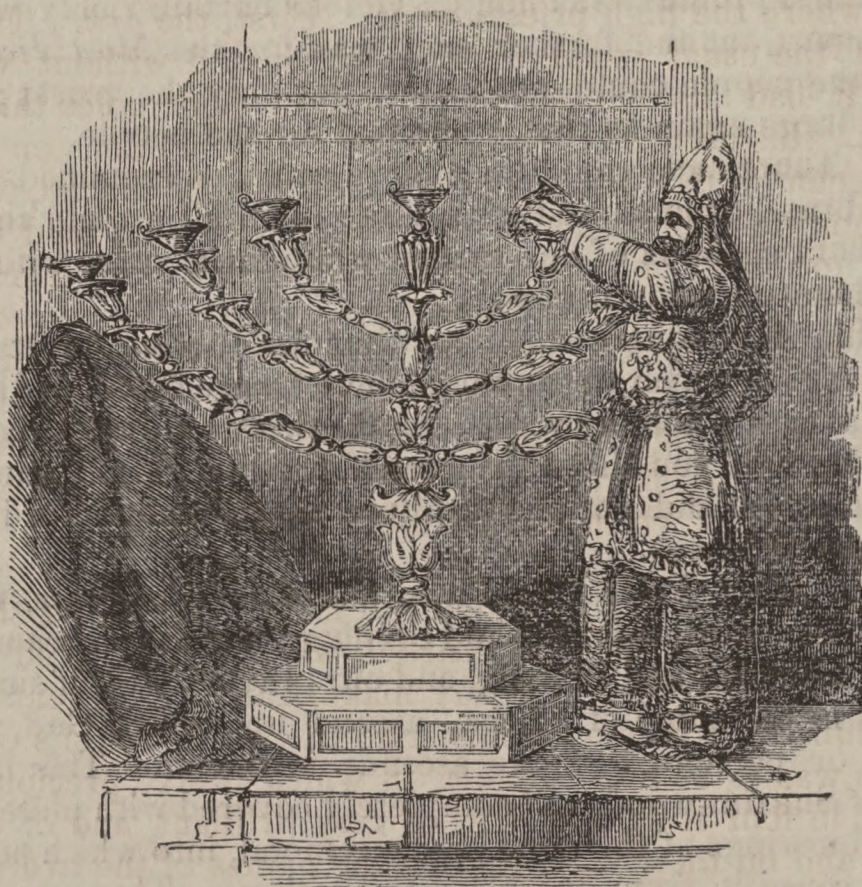
Having told you about this grand structure, I will now tell you about the rich and curious furniture which was put in it, as God commanded Moses.

In the *Holy Place* there was an *altar of incense*, on which incense was burnt morning and evening; which teaches us to pray to God morning and evening, and our prayers will, if sincere, and offered in the name of Christ, ascend up before God, as sweet incense or perfumed smoke ascends in the air. This altar was made of Shittim-wood, and completely covered with plates of gold. It had four rings of the same precious metal, into which poles were put to carry it from one place to another. There was also the table for the *shew bread*. It had its dishes, spoons, covers, and bowls, all made of pure gold. The bread was made every week; and the priests had that which was taken away every Sabbath day, as a part of their reward for their services. Its quality was of the finest kind, being made of the best wheaten flour. There were twelve cakes, being the number of the tribes of Israel: these were piled up in two equal rows, and pure frankincense, a sweet per





fume, put upon each row. The meaning of this bread, and the things about it, seems to have been, that God by his presence dwelt there; and though he need not eat as his creatures, yet these things were the signs of a dwelling-place, by which the Israelites were to understand he was amongst them. There was also the *golden candlestick*, which had seven branches for lights, and ornaments beautifully worked in the shape of flowers, and was worth about thirty thousand dollars of our money.



The lamps of this were lighted every evening, and put out every morning. As there were no windows to the Tabernacle, this light was much needed. It was also a sign of that *Holy Spirit*, which now shines into the mind to give it divine light; and when Christ sent his Spirit, that light, as a sign, was needed no more. So seventy years after Christ, Jerusalem was conquered by the Romans; and there is a large stone archway still at Rome, which was built





in memory of that conquest ; and, among the figures cut out on stone as taken from the Jews, is this candlestick, the table of shew bread, and some other things—so that the shape of the table and of the candlestick are well known to this day, and they are as the Lord commanded Moses. See how far back, and exactly, we can trace the correctness of the history of the Book of God, although it is so very old.

There were three things also very remarkable in the *Most Holy Place*, where the high priests went. First, the *ark*. This was a chest of the usual wood, overlaid within and without with pure gold. It had also gold rings to put staves or poles through, to carry it. Inside this ark were tables, or inscriptions on stone, of the covenant with God ; a golden pot with some manna, to be kept in remembrance of God's feeding Israel, when that food would be wanted no more ; and also Aaron's wonderful rod. There was a covering to the ark made of pure gold, called the *mercy-seat*, where God showed by signs of his glory, that he would be merciful to his people ; and upon this were placed what were called the cherubim, or figures with wings. We do not exactly know what these meant.

One more subject you will find in these chapters connected with the Temple, which was *the robes of the priests*.

God commanded Moses—"Thou shalt make holy garments for Aaron thy brother for glory and for beauty. And thou shalt speak unto all that are wise hearted, whom I have filled with the spirit of wisdom, that they may make Aaron's garments to consecrate him, that he may minister to me in the priest's office."

There was to be a *breastplate*, in which twelve precious stones were set in four rows ; they were very brilliant, and of different colours, and on these were written the names of the twelve tribes of Israel. Also, an *ephod* ; the common priests had it made plain of cloth, but the High Priest's was richly worked. This was a garment to cover the back and front of the body only, to be fastened to the shoulders by two precious stones ; and a *robe*, or upper coat, which was under the ephod, that, perhaps, fastening it down ; round the hem at the bottom of this garment there were a number of gold bells, to ring when the priest went into the Holy Place. And under this robe, next to the body, like a shirt, was to be what





is called "a broidered coat." And further, on his head there was to be a *mitre* or turban, something like what is worn by the Turks instead of hats. A *girdle* was to go round the waist, the two ends of which, after it was tied, fell down in front; and lastly, there was a curious girdle to the ephod.

Besides what we have named, there was what is called the *Urim and Thummim*, which was put into the breastplate, and by which the priest inquired for direction from Jehovah in all times of difficulty. No one can now exactly tell what the meaning of Urim and Thummim is. There was also a plate of gold on the front of the mitre, on which was written, "HOLINESS TO THE LORD."

All these garments were designed to show the dignity of the High Priest's office, and the purity which ought to belong to it.

Here is a representation of the High Priest in his robes.





The High Priest enjoyed great honours, and was considered next to the chief Governor of the Jews. No other person could enter the Holy of Holies, and all sacred things were under his entire direction. He offered the people's sacrifices, blessed them, and interceded for them, and was a type or representation of Jesus Christ, who is called, "the great High Priest of our profession, and who ever lives to plead for sinners."

Besides the High Priest, were many priests of less distinction, and they were all of the tribe of Levi, and of the family of Aaron.

Many of these prepared and offered the sacrifices, they kept a fire constantly burning on the altar for burnt-offerings, and they kept the lamps alive in the golden candlestick. They examined the people as to diseases and practices which made them impure; and, in time of war, they carried the holy ark with the people, and sounded the trumpets to encourage them in the battle. They also blessed the people, as did the High Priest.

Others of the Levites waited on the priests, and assisted them in their duties; they cleansed the sacred vessels, took care of the sacred place, sung psalms, played musical instruments, and did other services. These all were appointed cities to live in; and the priests, besides what they got from the sacrifices in the temple, had tithes, or a tenth of all the corn and fruit which grew every year, and of all the cattle that was added to the people's stock. Their duties were very laborious and important, and it was right that, while they performed them faithfully, the people should take care of them, and for this God provided.

A chief part of the priest's labours consisted in presenting the offerings of the people to God. He did not want what they offered, for the cattle on a thousand hills are his; but every beast and bird that was slain, taught them that they had sinned against God, and deserved to die as those creatures did; and while they must be sure that God could not forgive their sins, because they killed a bullock, a calf, a goat, a kid, a sheep, or a bird; those among them that truly served God, saw that all these things were signs, or "shadows of good things to come," and that they all pointed to the Messiah,—that is, Jesus Christ,—who was to be the great offering *once for all*, and then all these sacrifices were to be,





as they now are, done away. So that, instead of going with sacrifices to an altar, as the Jews did, we now go and pray to God to pardon our sins every day, for the sake of his dear Son Jesus Christ, who has loved us, and given himself for us, and whose precious blood "cleanseth from all sin." That is, having died for sinners, God accepts of the merits of Jesus Christ's death in behalf of all that truly trust in him, and he does away both the guilt and filthiness of their souls through sin, by Jesus Christ. I hope, my dear reader, that you understand me; for to understand this aright, and to believe it, and act upon it, is the grand point on which depends all your salvation, otherwise you must, as a guilty sinner against God, perish for ever.

The *offerings* had different names, as they were offered on different occasions. You read of many of them in the chapters on which I am making these remarks.

There were *burnt-offerings*, which were *all* consumed by fire, to show us that nothing less could save us than the entire sacrifice of Christ for our sins. There were *peace-offerings*, part of which were offered, and the rest went to the priest; these were signs of peace between God and the offerer. There were *sin-offerings*, for sins done without knowing they were sins at the time; and these teach us that all sin is destructive, and must be pardoned through Christ. There were *trespass-offerings*, of which we particularly read in Leviticus; these were offered if the person even doubted and supposed that he might, perhaps, have offended God Almighty. There were also *meat-offerings*, *drink-offerings*, and *wave-offerings*, so called from the priest waving or moving them backwards and forwards,—and a number of other offerings; all of which were to remind the people of Israel that they were sinners, and to make them humble before God, and grateful for his mercies.

These explanations will give you a notion of the meaning of these things, when you happen to read of them in the Bible, or to hear them mentioned in the pulpit.





MOUNT HOR—TOMB OF AARON.



BURNT OFFERINGS.



THE THIRTY-SECOND CHAPTER OF EXODUS.

The Golden Calf.

“And the Lord said unto Moses, Go, get thee down; for thy people, which thou broughtest out of the land of Egypt, have corrupted themselves:

“They have turned aside quickly out of the way which I commanded them: they have made them a molten calf and have worshipped it, and have sacrificed thereunto, and said, These be thy gods, O Israel, which have brought thee up out of the land of Egypt.”—Vers. 7, 8.

Moses having been with God in the Mount to receive instructions for the good of Israel, during forty days and forty nights, at length descended, bringing with him two tables or pages of stone, “written with the finger of God,” and having the ten commandments upon them.

I have before told you, that God has not bodily parts like us, for he is a *Spirit*; but as we write with our fingers, so, to make us understand that this writing was God’s own doing, it is said to be written by his finger, as we should do it.

With what delight did Moses bear this honourable and precious treasure, such as no nation beside could boast. But how greatly was he disappointed on his return!

The people, tired with waiting for Moses, and perhaps supposing that he had died somewhere in the Mount, wanted another leader, and forced Aaron to do as they pleased. And what do you think they fixed upon to lead them through the wilderness? You can hardly fancy they could be so foolish, when I tell you. Why, a lump of gold, made into the shape of a *calf*!

Here is the account we have of it in this chapter:—

“And when the people saw that Moses delayed to come down out of the Mount, the people gathered themselves together unto





Aaron, and said unto him, Up, make us gods, which shall go before us; for as for this Moses, the man that brought us out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him.

“And Aaron said unto them, Break off the golden earrings, which are in the ears of your wives, of your sons, and of your daughters, and bring them unto me.

“And all the people brake off the golden earrings which were in their ears, and brought them unto Aaron.

“And he received them at their hand, and fashioned it with a graving tool, after he had made it a molten calf: and they said, These be thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt.”

Was there ever conduct more stupid, more ungrateful, more provoking, and more wicked?

With the same readiness with which they had given their gold and silver to make the materials for the Tabernacle, they now gave their ornaments to make their fancied god; and, though they knew that Jehovah alone had brought them out of Egypt, they talked about different gods having done it, of which this calf was supposed to be a likeness.

This inclination to idols they had got in Egypt, where the people made and worshipped such things.

And how low, too, is poor Aaron fallen; for after he had made the molten calf, cast in a *mould*, as children cast playthings of lead, “When Aaron saw it, he built an altar before it; and Aaron made proclamation, and said, To-morrow is a feast to the Lord.

“And they rose up early on the morrow, and offered burnt offerings, and brought peace-offerings; and the people sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to play.”

This was the manner of the heathen; and it means that they ate and drank more than they ought, and that they did both foolishly and wickedly afterwards, as drunken people do.

God, who sees all things, saw what the people were about; and he sent Moses down to them, and threatened to destroy them. But Moses pleaded kindly for them, and so they were spared. Thus does Jesus plead for us poor sinners, or God would destroy us for doing what is wrong, not only once, but so often as we do.





And now Moses descended from the Mount, and he heard the people rejoicing, and he saw the calf and the dancing; and in his anger he threw down the tables of stone, of which they were so undeserving, and the laws which they had so shamefully broken, after they had promised faithfully to attend to them; and so the tables were broken in pieces.

“And he took the calf which they had made, and burnt it in the fire, and ground it to powder, and strewed it upon the water, and made the children of Israel drink of it.”

Gold powder will sink, but gold can be made into leaf, which is very light and very thin; and if it were so made, and then broken, it would easily swim. And so Moses made these foolish people swallow their god. Nothing could better teach them how foolish it was to worship idols.

Poor Aaron was quite ashamed, and he made a very weak excuse for the part he had taken in this affair. He said the people had forced him into it, which no doubt they had, but he ought to have opposed them when they were doing what was so wicked. And then he said, that when he took their gold he cast it into the fire, and there *came out the calf*; as if the calf would have come out if he had not made the mould.

And now Moses saw that the people were *naked* before their enemies—an expression which means wretched, as a person is that can get no clothes to wear; and that the anger of the Lord might be wholly turned away, he tried if there were any that disapproved of what had been done. And he stood in the gate of the camp, and cried, “Who is on the Lord’s side? let him come unto me. And all the sons of Levi gathered themselves together unto him.

“And he said unto them, Thus saith the Lord God of Israel,”—for God commanded this,—“Put every man his sword by his side, and go in and out from gate to gate throughout the camp, and slay every man his brother, and every man his companion, and every man his neighbour.

“And the children of Levi did according to the word of Moses: and there fell of the people that day about three thousand men.” These were, probably, the chief transgressors, and so God spared the rest of the people and destroyed them.





Moses now returned unto the Lord, and interceded for the people, and God heard him ; but on every new offence he did not forget this base act—" And the Lord plagued his people, because they made the calf which Aaron made."

THE THIRTY-THIRD CHAPTER OF EXODUS.

Israel again threatened with God's displeasure.

"For the Lord had said unto Moses, Say unto the children of Israel, Ye are a stiffnecked people: I will come up into the midst of thee in a moment, and consume thee: therefore now put off thy ornaments from thee, that I may know what to do unto thee."—Ver. 5.

Though God had spared Israel after the wicked act of idolatry which had been committed amongst them in worshipping the Golden Calf, yet he threatened to punish them, by no longer allowing the symbol of his presence to go with them, in the bright shining of the pillar of fire, and in the cloud, by which they had hitherto been guided.

The people, however, humbled themselves at God's command, and stripped themselves of their ornaments by the mount Horeb, which was among the Jews one of their strongest signs of mourning.

And now Moses pitched the Tabernacle "afar off from the camp; and it came to pass, as Moses entered into the Tabernacle, the cloudy pillar descended, and stood at the door of the Tabernacle, and the Lord talked with Moses." "And the Lord spake unto Moses, face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend." "No man hath seen God at any time:" this therefore means, that God condescended very graciously and familiarly, to make his will known to Moses, as a man would make known his mind to a friend.

Moses pleaded so earnestly with God for his presence, that God at length promised to grant it, for that alone could encourage





him in all his difficulties, and protect the people in all their dangers.

Moses, encouraged by God's kindness, now asked to see his glory, and God promised to show him some great token of his goodness, which is his glory. Concealed in the cleft or cave of a rock, God showed him as much of his glory as feeble human nature could bear, but in what way it is not possible to describe. When God speaks of covering him with his hand, and showing him his back parts, and not his face, we are not to understand that God has bodily parts like us, for "God is a spirit," and a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as we have: but it is a manner of speaking, to explain to the mind of a man things which he cannot well understand, but as they are made to meet his capacity. As the hand of a person, put before the eyes of another, may give a partial view of him, and as the back parts of a person only afford a small notion of that person, very different from what we should have were we to see his face, so God showed himself unto Moses. As I have endeavoured to make this plain to you, I hope you understand me.

THE THIRTY-FOURTH CHAPTER OF EXODUS.

The Ten Commandments renewed.

"And he hewed two tables of stone like unto the first; and Moses rose up early in the morning, and went up unto Mount Sinai, as the Lord had commanded him, and took in his hand the two tables of stone."—Ver. 4.

You remember that when Moses came down from the Mount, with the first tables, and saw the idolatry of the people in worshipping the Golden Calf, that he threw down the tables of stone, and brake them to pieces. God therefore now, in token of his still keeping Israel as his people, renewed his laws with them, and Moses was ordered to prepare some new tables, and to go again up into Mount Sinai.





And there the Lord proclaimed or made known to him his name, and that he was, "the Lord God, merciful and gracious." What a lovely name! Oh, let us love him who bears such a name!

And Moses "bowed his head forward to the earth and worshipped." And he pleaded again for Israel; and God promised to drive their enemies out of the promised land of Canaan; but he required, as a proof of their obedience to him, that they should destroy their altars, break their images, and cut down their groves, where they worshipped, as the Druids used to do, long after, in our own country.

And Moses was "with the Lord forty days and forty nights; he did neither eat bread nor drink water." This was a long time to go without food; but the power of God, which could feed Israel with manna from heaven, could as easily preserve Moses alive and well without food.

And Moses wrote upon the tables the words of the covenant, the ten commandments. In the first verse, you have probably observed that the Lord said unto Moses, "Hew these two tables of stone like unto the first, and I will write upon these tables the words that were in the first tables, which thou brakest;" but here it is said, "Moses wrote upon the tables." This is easily explained: God wrote the original commandments on the tables deposited or placed in the ark, and Moses probably wrote a copy for the use of the people.

And now Moses descended from the Mount, and having been favoured so greatly by God, "the skin of his face shone before all the people, and they were afraid to come nigh him." "And till Moses had done speaking with them, he put a veil on his face:" and he "spake unto the children of Israel that which he was commanded."





THE THIRTY-FIFTH CHAPTER OF EXODUS.

Offering for the Tabernacle.

"The children of Israel brought a willing offering unto the Lord, every man and woman whose heart made them willing to bring for all manner of work, which the Lord had commanded to be made by the hand of Moses."—Ver. 29.

In the account already given of *the Tabernacle, its Furniture, and Priests*, we shall find many things which explain this chapter, and you will there see how much gold and silver were given for the use of the Tabernacle. The account in this chapter teaches us that we are to do all that we can to establish the religion of our divine Lord in the world.

THE THIRTY-SIXTH, THIRTY-SEVENTH, THIRTY-EIGHTH, THIRTY-NINTH, AND FORTIETH CHAPTERS OF EXODUS.

Bezaleel and Aholiab filled with wisdom to do the work of the Tabernacle.

"Then wrought Bezaleel and Aholiab, and every wise-hearted man, in whom the Lord put wisdom and understanding to know how to work all manner of work for the service of the sanctuary, according to all the Lord hath commanded."—Chap. xxxvi. 1.

In the thirty-eighth chapter you read about *Looking-glasses*! but *glass* was not then invented; the people used what may be called *mirrors*, or *polished brass*, in which they could see their faces, and if you read the verse carefully, you will see that the things here called looking-glasses were made of brass.





In the chapter on the Tabernacle, we told you of the value of the gold and silver only which were used in the Tabernacle; but the value of all the metals together was much more and amounted to *one million, two hundred and twenty thousand, six hundred and thirty-eight dollars and sixty-two cents* and the weight of all the metals is reckoned to have been not less than fourteen tons, or *thirty-one thousand three hundred and sixty pounds*,—a prodigious weight!

In the thirty-ninth chapter, you read about an *habergeon*. This is a piece of armour to protect the body against the blow of a sword. It is made of iron rings, and is like half of a shirt, as it covers the neck and breast, and sometimes it has a cap added for the head. The Normans wore such armour when they invaded England under William the Conqueror, and some of it is still to be seen among the English cabinets. The robe of the High Priest's Ephod had a hole to let the head through just like the hole in an Habergeon.

And now we have come to the finishing of this Tabernacle. It was done as God had commanded, and he was pleased with it, and with the obedience of the people. It is a good thing to please God, for his favour is better than life. As a sign of his approbation, "a cloud covered the tent of the congregation, and the glory of the Lord filled the Tabernacle. And Moses was not able to enter into the tent of the congregation, because the cloud abode thereon; and the glory of the Lord filled the Tabernacle. And when the cloud was taken up from over the Tabernacle, the children of Israel went onward in all their journeys; but if the cloud were not taken up, they journeyed not till the day it was taken up; for the cloud of the Lord was upon the Tabernacle by day, and fire was on it by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel, throughout all their journeys."





LEVITICUS,

OR,

BOOK OF THE LAWS FOR THE LEVITES.

THE FIRST CHAPTER OF LEVITICUS.

The Burnt-offering.

“And he shall put his hand upon the head of the burnt-offering; and it shall be accepted for him to make atonement for him.”

—Ver. 4.

You were before told, in the chapter on the Tabernacle, that the Levites were all of the tribe of Levi, one of the twelve tribes of Israel; they were also of the family of Aaron, who descended from that tribe. These were all employed in various sacred services in the sanctuary, and their lives were wholly set apart to those services.

For a long time the patriarchs were priests in their own families, and offered up sacrifices; but by divine appointment the family of Aaron was now set apart to perform all sacred duties, as there was a large congregation, and a Tabernacle in which they were to assemble.

This book treats of the duties which the Priests and Levites were to perform.

You have been told (when we treated on the twenty-fourth and following chapters of Exodus) what is the meaning of a burnt-offering, and also why cattle and other creatures were offered in





sacrifice to God. In this chapter you may read the account of the burnt-offering.

You will see that it was to be “a male *without blemish* ;” that is, *the best* of the herd, for we ought always to serve God with the best of every thing. Especially should we try and give him the best of our days, before the evil days of age come, when we shall, if we live, be most likely feeble, and not so able to serve him. Then it is said, “he shall offer it of *his own voluntary will*, at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, before the Lord ;”—to teach you and me, that if we do not serve God with all our hearts, and delight in his worship and service as much as, and more than, you delight in your most agreeable play, our service is not pleasing in the sight of God. So I hope, that when you now offer your spiritual sacrifices of prayer and praise,—for these are now graciously accepted of God on account of Jesus Christ,—I say, I hope that when you now offer prayer and praise, you do so willingly, and even with *delight*, for “with such sacrifices God is well pleased.”

It is also said in the fourth verse, “And he,” that is, the person who offers the sacrifice, “shall put his hand upon the head of the burnt-offering ; and it shall be accepted for him, to make atonement for him.” Now in doing this, it was to signify that he deserved to die as the poor beast was to die ; but that he begged of God to accept the life of the animal instead of his life. And God did so ; having respect to the death of his dearly beloved Son Jesus Christ, who is called “the Lamb slain from before the foundation of the world ;” because God the Father had appointed him to be the great atoning sacrifice for guilty men, who if they trusted in his merits should not perish, but have eternal life. And there is no doubt that as we look back by faith to the merits of his death, so good men then *looked forward*, through these ceremonies, to him who in a future time should come to redeem Israel.

Now you may better understand the meaning of that verse of a hymn which is often sung in many congregations—

“ My faith would lay her hand
On that dear head of thine,
While like a penitent I stand,
And there confess my sin.”





But some persons were too poor to bring a bullock to be sacrificed when they offered a burnt-offering, and then they were to bring a calf, a sheep, a goat, a kid, or even a lamb—a “turtle dove,” or a “young pigeon.” So that the poorest were not neglected by a merciful God, and were taught alike to look to the same way of salvation. The rich and the poor both alike need a Saviour, and Jesus Christ, who is “the Lamb of God,” is “rich in mercy” to all them that call upon him.

THE SECOND CHAPTER OF LEVITICUS.

The Meat-offering.

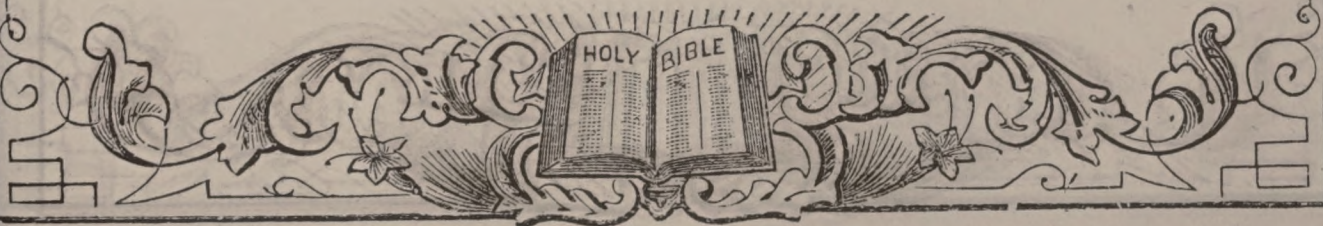
“And the priest shall take from the meat-offering a memorial thereof, and shall burn it upon the altar: it is an offering made by fire, of a sweet savour unto the Lord.”—Ver. 9.

The meat-offering was of five sorts:—1. Simple flour and meal. 2. Cakes and wafers; that is, very thin bread. 3. Cakes baked in a pan. 4. Cakes baked on the frying-pan, or probably a gridiron. 5. Green ears of corn parched.

In offering their meat-offerings, the Jews owned God as the giver of all the fruits of the earth; for it “is in him we live and move and have our being.” We can have no fruit to eat, till God first makes it grow.

There was to be *no leaven* or yeast in this offering; for that ferments and produces corruption, and our offerings to God must be pure. There was to be *no honey*; for the heathens offered that to Bacchus, a pretended god, and God would not be served with the same as the heathen deities. There was to be *salt* with all the sacrifices; for it seasons things and makes them *savoury*, teaching us again that our *good things* must be presented to God.

All these things, and some more about which I shall tell you, are called *typical*—that is, they are meant to show to us other things of much more importance than they themselves; just as a picture shows us the likeness of a real person, but you know it is not the person.





THE THIRD, FOURTH, FIFTH, SIXTH, AND SEVENTH CHAPTERS OF
LEVITICUS.

The Sacrifices.

“This is the law of the burnt-offering, of the meat-offering, and of the sin-offering, and of the trespass-offering, and of the consecrations, and of the sacrifice of the peace-offerings; which the Lord commanded Moses, in Mount Sinai, in the day that he commanded the children of Israel to offer their oblations unto the Lord, in the Wilderness of Sinai.”—Chap. vii. 37, 38.

Of the burnt-offering and meat-offering we have treated in the two preceding chapters; and, as I told you before, the meaning of all these offerings is explained, where we have considered the twenty-fourth and following chapters of the book of Exodus.

As the sacrifices very much resembled each other, all having respect to the great sacrifice of Christ, we need not explain them any more, separately. Only it will be well for you to remember, that when we read about the killing of the animals, and the sprinkling of blood upon the altars, and the offering of fruits, and burning of different parts, and the giving of other parts to the priests, and a number of other particulars; though at first sight they may not seem to be very interesting, yet they are very much so, when we can find out their meaning; and this is not left to our fancies, but we may know it by looking at other parts of the Bible. For instance, we read in the ninth chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews, “For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh; how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit, offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?”—in other words, if the blood of the animals offered by the priests under the law given by Moses, had so much virtue, that it removed uncleanness and guilt, or sin and guilt before God, he having





promised it should do so because he had commanded it; then how much more shall the precious virtue of the blood of Jesus Christ, who died to save sinners, and through the power of his spirit sustained all our load of guilt, which no mere human creature could have borne;—how much more shall the virtue of his sacrifice take away all guilt from the conscience arising from sinful deeds, so that you may with pleasure serve the living God!

Again, we read in the same chapter, that “CHRIST was *once* offered to bear the sins of many.” For other sacrifices were offered *from time to time*, as offences occurred, and there were even *daily* sacrifices; but when Christ died on Calvary, he died *once* for *all*, and all sacrifices then ceased. For, it is worthy of your notice, that soon after Christ had died on Calvary, the Jewish nation was, for their hardness of heart against God, destroyed and scattered abroad in all countries, as they are to this day. The Romans, then a great power, were God’s instruments to effect this; and then their temple was destroyed, in which their sacrifices were offered, and the tribes were mixed all in confusion; so that the tribe of Levi could soon no longer be known, to offer sacrifices. But Christ had made them needless: they had all along been as guides to lead to him; and now he was slain, those who would be saved, must by faith trust on the benefits of his death, “who himself bare our sins in his own body on the tree.”

Think what a labour and expense all these sacrifices must have been; and what a burden of ceremonies was taken away, when the Saviour closed, as it were, the book of the Law, and opened to us that of the everlasting Gospel, which says only, “*Believe* on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved.”

You will find a number of seemingly trifling instructions given to the priests in performing their duties and offering the sacrifices, and perhaps some may be difficult to understand; but you must never forget that they teach us this one great truth,—they point, as it were, to Jesus Christ, and say, “Behold the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world.”

We must make another remark, and that is, that the priests were often to eat part of the sacrifices; because, as they gave their time to these labours, in slaying the sacrifices for the benefit of the





people, they were to live by their labours as well as others,—teaching us that the ministers who preach the Gospel to us, ought to receive proper support.

Again, the law in the sixth chapter, verses one to seven, must not be passed over without our notice. I would have you read it. It is a law against dishonesty, which may not exactly come under the common name of *stealing*, but which God showed that he noticed, and that it was sinful. If a man kept as his own, anything that was only lent to him, or left with him by his neighbour; or, if he found anything belonging to another, and called it his own, without trying to find out who was the owner; he was to restore the thing and add to it a fifth part more value;—so that had he stolen anything worth five shillings, he must have given back six; and he was to make a trespass offering to the Lord, and the priest was to make an atonement for him. So you see how every sin, how little soever it may seem to us, exposes us to the displeasure of Almighty God; and that if it were not that there has been a great sacrifice offered for sin, and that we may humbly confess our sin, and repent before God, and look to him for pardon through Jesus Christ, we should be miserable, and without the favour of God for ever.

There are some customs not yet noticed, which must also be explained before we proceed. In the fourth chapter we read that the bullock offered in sacrifice was to be burnt *without the camp*. The Israelites, you know, lived for a long time in tents in the wilderness, and when these tents were all pitched together, they formed what is called a *camp*—looking like a number of little cottages standing in rows. The carrying of the bullocks outside the camp to be burnt, was intended to signify that sin is a very offensive thing. The priest had committed a sin, he had laid his hand on the head of the animal and confessed it; the sin was thus considered as laid on the beast, and the bullock was made vile. It also expressed that this sin was now taken away and the camp was purified from it. Now, the writer to the Hebrews says, “It is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats should take away sins.” No; they only did this as a type or picture of what Christ afterwards did in reality. So in the Hebrews this custom is thus





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CEDARS OF LEBANON.



explained:—"For the bodies of those beasts whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high-priest, for sin, are burned without the camp. Therefore, Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate." When the Jews dwelt in houses, and worshipped in the Temple at Jerusalem, these bodies were carried outside the gates of the city; and when Christ, the great sacrifice, was offered up, it was on *Mount Calvary*, which was *outside the gates* of that city. This will help further to show you the meaning of these sacrifices, and how nearly the *type*, or thing representing, was like the *antitype*, or thing which had been *represented*.

You also read in many parts, as in the fifth chapter, of *unclean things*, and their *uncleanness*. There were many things which made a person unclean—that is, not fit to worship with the rest, nor to dwell among them, being considered as impure. It was then considered, for instance, that touching a dead body, and other things prohibited, made a person unclean. And when this was the case, he was to wash his clothes and his body in clean water, and to wait some hours before he could be called clean. Such things are not now necessary; but they were then typical, and were designed to show that God's people are to hate and avoid sin of every kind as much as possible, and to be a *holy people*.

THE EIGHTH AND NINTH CHAPTERS OF LEVITICUS.

Consecration and Duties of the Priests.

"And Moses took of the anointing oil, and of the blood which was upon the altar, and sprinkled it upon Aaron, and upon his garments, and upon his sons, and upon his sons' garments with him; and sanctified Aaron, and his garments, and his sons, and his sons' garments with him."—Chap. viii. 30.

Moses, in the way in which he was commanded, consecrated, or set apart, Aaron and his sons to be priests, and to offer up the sacrifices of the people of Israel.





You have been told something about these, in what has been said on the twenty fourth and following chapters of Exodus.

There is one thing which ought to be noticed in this place, that you may understand its meaning, because it appears at first to be a very odd kind of ceremony. After the ram of consecration was slain, "Moses took of the blood of it, and put it upon the tip of Aaron's right ear, and upon the thumb of his right hand, and upon the great toe of his right foot;" and then he did the same also to Aaron's sons. This is generally supposed to mean, that the priest's ears should be holy, and that his hands should be employed in holy work, and his feet should tread in holy ways; and as the blood was to touch each part, that the blood of the atonement, shed on Calvary, as it were, touching our hearts by believing in it, alone can render our services acceptable and pure in the sight of God. Every little thing here commanded had, without doubt, some interesting meaning.

THE TENTH CHAPTER OF LEVITICUS.

Awful Judgment on Nadab and Abihu.

"And Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took either of them his censer, and put fire therein, and put incense thereon, and offered strange fire before the Lord, which he commanded them not. And there went out fire from the Lord, and devoured them, and they died before the Lord."—Vers. 1, 2.

See here the consequences of not minding the commands of God. Nadab and Abihu had just been appointed priests, and it was a part of their duty to burn incense, as an emblem or sign of *prayer*, which, if offered aright, ascends to heaven, and especially of the merits of Jesus Christ, which always plead in heaven for them that pray for blessings on his account.





But Nadab and Abihu disobeyed the command of God ; for they not only took the incense of their own accord, when he “commanded them not,” but they presumptuously disregarded what God had said about burning incense on the altar of incense, as it is recorded in the ninth verse of the thirtieth chapter of Exodus—“Ye shall offer *no strange incense* thereon.” Moses had not given them any of the incense which he had ordered to be made according to the Divine direction, so that they must have used some common kind of incense ; besides this, instead of taking sacred fire from the altar, which had been kindled with fire from heaven, they took strange fire,—probably from that with which the flesh of the peace-offering was boiled, as Moses commanded Aaron and his sons, as mentioned in the eighth chapter and the thirty-first verse.

The priests were also commanded to burn incense, *one at a time* ; but here *both* went together to do it. This seems a severe punishment for such an offence ; but it was very wicked to disobey God ; and, by taking common fire, they profaned God’s sacred altar. It had also been threatened in the Law, that those who disobeyed the commands of God, should be cut off from the people. And now God shows that what he spoke was truth. In an instant Aaron’s two sons fell dead : God struck them with a blast of lightning ; for as neither their bodies nor coats were burnt, and yet they were suddenly dead, the manner of their death shows how it was done. If, indeed, any person is struck dead by lightning in a common way, we are not to consider that as any judgment of the Almighty—it is only one way in which he is pleased to take him out of this world ; but where a sinner is cut off in the act of awfully offending God, and especially as in this case, where God had threatened such a destruction to the offender, we are right in viewing it as a solemn warning to hardened sinners ; and it teaches us that it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

And now their worthless bodies were carried out of the camp, looked upon, no doubt, with wonder by the affrighted people ; and lest they should seem to favour their sin in any way, none of their kindred were allowed to mourn for them. O ! “who is able to stand against this holy Lord God ?”





My young reader, if you are at any time tempted to break God Almighty's commands, to take his name in vain, to neglect his Sabbath day, to lie or to steal, or to rebel against the good advice and orders of a good father or mother; though, indeed, you may not be struck dead, yet remember you are sinning against that Almighty Being, who shall bring "every work into judgment" when you leave this world; and think on the fearful end of Nadab and Abihu.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER OF LEVITICUS.

Laws respecting the Food of the Israelites.

"This is the law of the beasts, and of the fowl, and of every living creature that moveth in the waters, and of every creature that creepeth upon the earth: to make a difference between the unclean and the clean, and between the beast that may be eaten and the beast that may not be eaten."—Vers. 46, 47.

The Israelites were God's peculiar people, and he would therefore distinguish them as much as possible from all others. Among other things, he regulated their food, and told them what they were to eat, and what they were not to eat.

You ask, "What reason can be given for this law?" And the answer must be that which the good Matthew Henry gives, who wrote a work on the Bible. He says, "It is reason enough that God would have it so: his will, as it is law sufficient, so it is reason sufficient; for his will is his wisdom. He saw good thus to try and exercise the obedience of his people, not only in the solemnities of his altar, but in matters of daily occurrence at their own table, that there they might remember they were under authority. Thus God had tried the obedience of man in innocency, by forbidding him to *eat of one particular tree*." He, however, mentions some reasons which are also very good ones: "Most of the meats





forbidden as *unclean* are such as were really *unwholesome*, and not fit to be eaten; and those of them that we think wholesome enough, and use accordingly, as the coney (a kind of rabbit), the hare, and the swine, perhaps in those countries, and to their bodies, might be hurtful: and then, God in this law did by them but as a wise and loving father does by his children, whom he restrains from eating that which he knows will make them sick. God would, also, thus teach his people to distinguish themselves from other people, not only in their religious worship, but in the common actions of life." In this way they were types, or pictures, to show what all good people should be in future ages—a people whose lives and customs should differ from those of the rest of the world. "The learned observe further, that most of the creatures which by this law were to be *abominated* as *unclean*, were such as were held in mighty veneration among the heathen, not so much for food as for divination, (or fortune-telling,) and sacrifice to their gods; and therefore those are here mentioned as *unclean* and an *abomination*;" as, for instance, the nasty-feeding raven, and the owl, "which yet they would not be in any temptation to eat, that they might keep up a religious loathing" of that which the Gentiles (or heathen) had a superstitious value for.





Many things forbidden to the Israelites, which are not hurtful, we now eat, as pigs, and hares, and rabbits ; for we are not restricted as the Jews were ; and the Gospel teaches us that " every creature of God is good," and we are " to call nothing common or unclean." Even the touch of any of these animals after they were dead, defiled ; so that the person that touched them was obliged to wash his clothes, and be for awhile unclean, and keep company with no one. And the very things which they touched must be washed as unclean ; and if they were made of earthenware, they were to be broken. By these things they were taught to avoid everything that could pollute them. And they show us, as in a glass or picture, how much God hates sin, which is to the soul much more defiling than these things could be to the body, and highly offensive to his holy nature.

Before we finish this chapter, let us see what further wants explanation. Perhaps you do not know what *dividing the hoof*, or being *cloven-footed*, means. A cloven foot is a foot like an ox, where the hoof is divided into two toes. All oxen are, therefore, cloven-footed. Again ; what is *chewing the cud* ? You must know that an ox, when he bites the grass, swallows it down without chewing it, and so he does not stop, but bites away for a long time ; and if you go into the stall, or watch him standing upright in the field or under the tree, you will generally see his mouth in motion ; he is then *chewing the cud*. The grass has been thrown up out of a stomach where it first went when the ox nibbled it : and, in the shape of small balls, it is chewed again in the mouth, and then it goes into a second stomach in which are cells like a honeycomb. You may have seen this stomach, as it appears in tripe : here the food is ground again, and then it goes into a third stomach, and last of all into a fourth stomach, where it is completely digested, and its nourishing parts, becoming a liquid, pass into the veins and blood, to strengthen and keep alive the body. All this is very curious, and it is a small part of the wonderful works of God.

Among the creatures named, perhaps you do not know what is meant by the *ossifrage* and the *ospray* ; they are both eagles of a different kind. I scarcely need explain to you what is an eagle :





you must have often heard that it is a large and ravenous bird, with a strong crooked beak, and a very keen eye, by which it sees its prey at a great height, and then darts down upon it with wonderful swiftness; and that it will often seize upon the poor little lamb, and kill it, and then suck its blood.

The *vulture*, and the *kite*, and the *raven*, are all birds of prey—that is, they kill other creatures and eat them. They all feed on dead carcasses in the most putrid or rotten state, and are very useful, in hot countries, to eat up any corrupted bodies they may find, and so prevent them from tainting the air and bringing on diseases; but it is very plain that they must be exceedingly unfit to eat.

The *night-hawk* is by some called the Oriental, or Eastern owl. It is a very cruel bird; and in Syria, if night-hawks find the windows open in the evening, they will even fly into houses, and kill poor little infants, unless they are very carefully watched.

The *cormorant* is a sea-fowl which feeds on fish.

The *pelican* is a very curious bird, and has a large pouch, or bag, under its bill, out of which it feeds its young.

The *stork* is a bird that sets us a noble pattern in attending on and feeding its parents when they are grown old and cannot help themselves; but as it destroyed and ate serpents, Moses forbade the Israelites to eat it.





The *bat* is an animal that is partly beast and bird ; having four legs like the one, and a kind of wings like the other, only they are a thin skin instead of feathers. Its body is something like that of a mouse. It flies about in the evening, and mostly feeds on insects. In some parts of the world, bats are very large, and will fall upon animals and men when asleep, and kill them by sucking their blood.

The *locust* is a winged insect, and is very much like the grasshopper. Locusts are still eaten in some parts of India, where they are parched in earthen pans, when they appear like boiled shrimps. These the Jews might eat.

The *beetle* never has been eaten by man in any country, and there is reason to believe that a kind of locust is intended. This is a trifling mistake, made by the English translators, when they turned the Hebrew Bible into English, at a time when the history of some of these insects was not so well known as it is at present.



The *weasel*, here forbidden to be eaten, is also thought to be a mistake ; and that the creature meant is what we call the *mole*, a little animal that lives underground, and raises what we call mole-hills in the fields.

The *chameleon* is a kind of lizard. The lizard has a short body resembling that of a snake, yet it has legs, and is very different in its nature ; for the chameleon destroys snakes.

After this description, you will better see the reason why God prohibited the Jews from eating some animals, while he allowed them to eat others.





THE THIRTEENTH AND FOURTEENTH CHAPTERS OF LEVITICUS.

The Laws on the Leprosy.

“This is the law for all manner of plague of leprosy, and scall, and for the leprosy of a garment, and of a house, and for a rising, and for a scab, and for a bright spot: to teach when it is unclean, and when it is clean: this is the law of leprosy.”—Chap. xiv. 54—57.

We often read in Scripture about lepers.

The leprosy is a very corrupt disorder. There were three sorts of it; one in *men*, another in *clothes*, and another in *houses*.

In *men* this disorder affects the skin, and produces white scurf and scabs, and corrupts the whole mass of blood. It is dangerous to touch a leper, for the disorder is very infectious. Travellers in the East have seen people afflicted with it; and they say that it defiles all the skin, and swells all the joints of the body, particularly the wrists and the ankles, so that the sufferer is quite an ugly object. The poor who have this disorder, beg with buckets to receive the alms; perhaps, because they will not touch the money, which people would then be afraid of taking.

The leper, under the law, was commanded to show himself to the priest; and Moses being divinely taught to point out the signs of a dangerous leprosy, gave proper directions for examining him. If the disorder was of a bad kind, the leper was to be separated from society; he was to tear his clothes, as the Jews did in extreme grief; he was to throw off his turban, and have his head bare; and to put a covering upon his upper lip, his jaws being tied up with a linen cloth, as the dead were bound up; and in addition to these marks, by which he might be known and avoided, he was to cry, “Unclean, unclean;” and he was to dwell alone, and at a distance from the camp.

When a leper was cured, there were several ceremonies to be gone through, which are mentioned in the fourteenth chapter.





These ceremonies cannot now be exactly explained ; but they meant that he was now *pure*, and might return to enjoy all the privileges of the people.

The leprosy in clothes seemed to have been something like moths in garments ; and it is supposed that it was caused by a kind of insect getting into them.

The leprosy in houses certainly resembled what builders call the *dry-rot*, which now gets into houses, beginning at the foundation, and causing all the timbers soon to rot, even to the top, if not speedily cured. It is thought that a sort of worms produced this evil. In some cases this leprosy was very obstinate, and the house was in consequence entirely pulled down.

Now, my dear young reader, you may wonder why there is so much about this leprosy mentioned here ; but I have told you, that all things under the law were shadows or representations of spiritual things, or things relating to the soul, and which still exist. Do you know that you have got this dangerous leprosy ? I will tell you what it is ;—*Sin* : for “all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.” Sin *defiles* the soul before God, as the leprosy defiles the body. Sin is *infectious*, and one sinner destroys much good. If our souls have been purified by faith in Jesus Christ, in the virtues of whose *blood* the spiritual leper finds all the benefits that the leper did from the ceremony of the dead and the living bird, then are we especially to mind the advice of Solomon : “My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not ;” and to study to avoid all sin, for whoever lives in it is a leper, and unholy in the sight of God.

O, let us humble ourselves before God ; confess all our numerous faults ; come to him to cure us ; and trust in the *blood*, or in other words, the *merits* of Jesus Christ, to cleanse us from *all sin* ; for his *merits* were shown when he died on the cross, that we might not *die* for ever, and when he rose from the grave that we might *live* for ever, if we believe in him. For this reason, *perhaps*, a bird was killed at the ceremony of the purification of the leper, to show that *Christ died for our sins* ; and another bird was let loose, after being dipped in the blood of the slain bird, to show forth the resurrection of our Saviour, in consequence of having done away





our guilt, by his death in our stead, who otherwise deserved death. I have, however, said *perhaps* ; for though all these truths are in some way to be found in the ceremonies of the law, which in the New Testament are called shadows of things to come, and therefore representing the Gospel as a shadow does the body, yet we must not fancy things in reading God's word, but content ourselves with what he has been so condescending as to teach us, in a way which, by prayer and humble dependence upon the teaching of God Almighty, we may all understand.

The leprous house may, in the same way, show us that, as there is sin in our mortal body, which is the house of the soul, and which sin exposes us to pain, decay, and death ; so it is only by the pulling down of the body, or house, that we can entirely get rid of sin ; and then, when the believer's body is turned to dust, God, who first made it, shall make it again, and change this vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto the glorious body of the Redeemer.

Thus, my dear young reader, you may be able to see how it is that there is so much said in Scripture about the leper, which there would not have been, if it had not taught something which particularly concerns you and me, who are as poor lepers in the sight of God, by the defilement of sin ; but who may be purified and made fit for heaven, through faith in the death of Christ, our great sacrifice—our only Saviour.

Now you will perhaps better understand that Psalm when you hear it sung :—

“ Lord, I am vile, conceived in sin,
And born unholy and unclean ;
Sprung from the man,* whose guilty fall
Corrupts the race, and taints us all.

“ Soon as we draw our infant breath,
The seeds of sin grow up for death ;
Thy law demands a perfect heart,
But we're defil'd in every part.

* That is, *Adam*.





"Great God, create my heart anew,
And form my spirit pure and true ;
O make me wise betimes, to spy
My danger and my remedy.

"Behold I fall before thy face ;
My only refuge is thy grace :
No outward forms can make me clean ;
The *leprosy* lies deep within.

"No bleeding bird, nor bleeding beast,
Nor hyssop-branch, nor sprinkling priest,
Nor running brook, nor flood, nor sea,
Can wash the dismal stain away.

"Jesus, my God, thy blood alone
Hath power sufficient to atone ;
Thy blood can make me white as snow ;
No Jewish types could cleanse me so."

THE SIXTEENTH CHAPTER OF LEVITICUS.

The Scape-Goat.

'And Aaron shall lay both his hands upon the head of the live goat, and confess over him all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions in all their sins, putting them upon the head of the goat, and shall send him away by the hand of a fit man into the wilderness : and the goat shall bear upon him all their iniquities, unto a land not inhabited : and he shall let go the goat in the wilderness.'—Vers. 21, 22.

We need not now read the fifteenth chapter. It was of importance to the Jews, but is not so necessary to us, as it treats only on issues and different kinds of uncleanness. We learn, however, from all these ceremonial laws, that God hates impurity ; for all





impurity of the *body*, for which atonement was made by shedding the *blood of beasts*, was meant to show to us that God hates impurity of *soul*, and that it can only be taken away by the *blood of Jesus Christ*—the great sacrifice for *sin*.

The grand subject of the sixteenth chapter, to which your attention is called, is the *great day of atonement*, on which the *SCAPE-GOAT* was made to bear the sins of the people. The numerous other sacrifices were for particular persons, and on occasions which respected objects of a more limited nature, but on this occasion, an atonement was made for *the whole Israelitish nation*: this happened once a year: the whole service of the day was performed by the high-priest, who was to be dressed, not in his splendid robes, but in a humble dress of linen: he was to bring, first a sin-offering and a burnt-offering for himself; to offer first his sin-offering, and then to go within the vail with some of the blood of his sin-offering, burn incense, and sprinkle the blood before the mercy-seat. Two goats were to be provided for the people; lots were then to be cast, to know which goat to offer: this was done by putting two pieces of wood, stone, or metal, into a pot, on one of which was written, "for the scape-goat:" the goats then stood on the priest's right and left hand, and as he took out the papers with both hands, the one to whose lot that name fell, was to be set free. The one goat was then slain as a sin-offering for the people; and the blood of it, and of the other sin-offering, was sprinkled upon the altar. The other was to be the *SCAPE-GOAT*, or the goat which was allowed to escape: the high-priest laid his hands on his head, and then confessed the sins of Israel; and he was to bear away these sins into the wilderness, to which he was led, and allowed to go free. Burnt-offerings and sin-offerings were then added: the fat of the sin-offering was burnt on the altar, and the flesh without the camp. The people rested from labour on that day, and they mourned their sins. This was the practice on the day of atonement.

You will wonder how the *SCAPE-GOAT* could bear away the sins of the people; but, my dear young reader, this scape-goat was to typify or exhibit, as in a picture, the Great Saviour of sinners, *JESUS CHRIST*, of whom the sacrifices were constant representations.





We are pardoned through the *death* of Christ, who “died for our sins,” if we believe on him; and we shall be made inheritors of the kingdom of heaven, and enjoy immortal life,—that is, a life of joy that can never end,—through the *resurrection* of Christ. Now, both these truths were taught here as in a shadow. But one goat could not teach both; for the goat that died could not live again. Therefore there were two goats appointed to be used: one was *slain*, as I have told you, to set forth the death of Christ, the great atonement or *reconciler* between God and man; and the other was *let free* into the wilderness, bearing the people's sins, to show that all those were to be forgotten through him, and lost like the goat in the wilderness, and that through his *life* we should *not die*.

THE TWENTY-THIRD AND TWENTY-FOURTH CHAPTERS OF LEVITICUS.

The Blasphemer stoned.

“And he that blasphemeth the name of the Lord, he shall surely be put to death, and all the congregation shall certainly stone him: as well the stranger, as he that is born in the land, when he blasphemeth the name of the Lord, shall be put to death.”
—Chap. xxiv. 16.

We purposely omit several chapters which were commands to the Israelites not to do a number of bad things practised by the heathen, and of which it is painful to read. They teach us, however, to pity those who are given up to wicked practices, and to do all in our power to try and bring the poor heathen, who know no better, to the knowledge of that divine Saviour whom they so greatly need. There are also some laws respecting the priests and the sacrifices, which we have already in some way noticed.

The twenty-third chapter also treats about several feasts which we have noticed, except that it mentions the feast of *trumpets*. About this feast no explanation is given in Scripture, and therefore we cannot explain it. It is supposed, however, to have been





a feast kept on the New Year's Day, to express gratitude to God for his goodness during the past year, and thankfulness for seeing the new one.

In the twenty-fourth chapter you will find several laws for punishing offenders, so that what harm soever any one did to another, the same was to be done to him. So you read of "an eye for an eye," and "a tooth for a tooth;" that is, if a man knocked out the eye of another, he was to have his eye knocked out; or if he knocked out a tooth, he was to lose a tooth for so doing. This was always regulated by the magistrate, and not by the person who was hurt; and it is thought that a sum of money, reckoned in some degree according to the greatness of the injury, was often appointed to be given to the injured person, instead of injuring him who did the harm. Our Saviour has set aside this law; and in the Gospel of St. Matthew, the fifth chapter and thirty-eighth verse, he teaches us that it is better to forgive, as those who hope to be forgiven; not but that there are aggravated offences of this kind, where, not to punish the offender, would be to leave him to do the same thing to others, and thus do harm by our forgiveness. But while the law of Moses was severe, the law of Jesus Christ was full of mercy.

That which particularly deserves notice in this chapter, is the death of the blasphemer.

To blaspheme is to take God's name in vain, that is, to use it lightly or without reverence; and you know that a commandment was given, which said, "The Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain." As yet, however, it was not exactly known what was to be done to the blasphemer, and so Moses inquired of the Lord, who, by some sign, intimated that he should be put to death.

The Jews, among all their crimes, were yet afraid to take God's name in vain, so that none of them were punished for this shocking sin. But this was the son of a Jewish woman, who had married an Egyptian, and no doubt he had learnt this wicked habit from his father. It happened that he quarrelled with an Israelite; and as they strove together, he, being in a passion, used the wicked words which cost him his life. He was taken out of the





camp; the people that heard him curse put their hands on his head, in token that they were free from his crime, and that he was to bear his own guilt; and to show that all the congregation approved of the justice of his sentence, they became the executioners, and stoned him to death.

We have many blasphemers in our country, but we have no law to put them to death: in some States they are fined a few dollars; but even this punishment is seldom inflicted upon them. But God is long-suffering, and his Gospel leaves the sinner time to repent; however, if the swearer do not repent, and forsake his wicked ways, for these things God will bring him into judgment.

THE TWENTY-FIFTH CHAPTER OF LEVITICUS.

The Year of Jubilee.

“And ye shall hallow the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof: it shall be a jubilee unto you; and ye shall return every man unto his possession, and ye shall return every man unto his family.”
Ver. 10.

The Jews, besides keeping every seventh day as a day of rest, were also commanded to keep every seventh year, called on that account *the Sabbatical Year*. This was an additional remembrancer of the Sabbath day. In that year, therefore, they neither sowed nor reaped, but only gathered anything the ground produced of its own accord, just as they wanted it; leaving the rest for the poor, for servants, for strangers, and cattle. Thus they were taught compassion towards servants and cattle, and benevolence to the poor; thus they were instructed to depend upon God's providence for their support, who could, if they obeyed his commands, provide for them without labour, or bless their labour; and thus they were reminded of a better rest, which this was to signify—a never-ending sabbath in heaven.





There was another remarkable privilege enjoyed by the Jews, and that was the *Year of Jubilee*.

This was every *fiftieth* year. After spending "seven times seven years," which make forty-nine, the Jews were to keep the fiftieth year, or some think, the last year of the forty-nine.

In this year there was neither sowing nor reaping; but the earth brought forth fruit of itself. All estates which had been bought were restored to their first owners, so that no family could be finally made poor by a father's selling the property for ever. Hebrew slaves, with their wives and children, were set free; and even all foreign slaves enjoyed the right of the jubilee. The first nine days were spent in joyful feasting; on the tenth, which happened always to be the great day of the annual atonement, the trumpets were sounded, and at that moment the slaves were declared free, and the lands returned to their ancient owners. Houses and other buildings in walled towns only, did not return to the old proprietor in the jubilee.

By this wise law, the rich could not oppress the poor, by getting possessed of all the property in the country; and debts could not last always, for the jubilee made them void; and the slave had a hope of a final release.

In making purchases, therefore, this law was always remembered, and a proportionable value was given as the year of jubilee drew nigh.

But this year had a spiritual signification. It was a type or representation of the redemption of sinners, by Christ, from the slavery of sin and Satan, and the restoring of man, who by transgression has lost his title to eternal blessedness, so that he becomes the heir of heaven—that "inheritance which is incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away."

In many religious assemblies they often sing a hymn which refers to this Jewish institution, and which partly explains its meaning; it is too long to be inserted here, but a few verses may assist in explaining the subject, and impressing it on your memory. It begins with alluding to the preaching of the Gospel, which is often compared to the blowing of the jubilee trumpet, which proclaimed liberty to the captive; and so does the Gospel





proclaim deliverance to all those who are the slaves of sin, and would desire deliverance through the great Saviour of sinners.

“ Blow ye the trumpet, blow
The gladly solemn sound !
Let all the nations know,
To earth's remotest bound,
The year of jubilee is come ;
Return, ye ransom'd sinners, home.

“ Ye who have sold for nought
The heritage above,
Shall have it back unbought,
The gift of Jesus' love :
The year of jubilee is come ;
Return, ye ransom'd sinners, home.

“ Ye slaves of sin and hell,
Your liberty receive,
And safe in Jesus dwell,
And blest in Jesus live :
The year of jubilee is come ;
Return, ye ransom'd sinners, home.

“ Exalt the Lamb of God,
The sin-atoning Lamb ;
Redemption by his blood
Through all the lands proclaim :
The year of jubilee is come ;
Return, ye ransom'd sinners, home.”

You will wonder to read about *slaves* among the people who were the particular people of God ; this must therefore be explained to you before this book is closed, and perhaps this is the best time.

The Hebrews had a great number of slaves. These differ from servants, in this way : a servant may do the same work, but is not





his master's property, and may leave him whenever he likes ; but a slave is his master's property, as much as his horse or his ox, and durst not run away ; nor is another allowed to keep him, for he keeps stolen goods. I am sorry to write as if slaves still exist ; for they do. There were many slaves in our country till recently ; and in some of the West Indies, they have black people to cultivate the sugar-cane and tobacco, because the country is too hot for whites to work, who are used to a colder climate ; and many of these people and their parents were, not long since, *stolen* from their own country in Africa, and sold as slaves, and cruelly treated by their masters ; indeed, some of them are very rough to them still. But Jewish slaves were not liable to the same evils. Those taken in war were bought, sold, or exchanged, like goods ; but this was a special punishment of the Almighty on idolaters, and none of these were *stolen* ; for he that stole a man was to be put to death. The Hebrew slaves were poor persons, who *sold themselves*, just as a man now takes what is called a *bounty*, or a sum of money, to become a soldier for many years ; or they had run in debt without thinking how they were to pay, and were obliged to *sell themselves* for want of money ; or they were delivered as slaves by their parents, who were not able to keep them, and so were a kind of apprentices for a number of years. You may read the account of them in this chapter. The heathen slaves were to be such always ; but even they were not to be cruelly treated ; for, in the twenty-first chapter of Exodus, we read a noble law, which obliged the unmerciful slave-holder to set the slave at liberty, whose eye or tooth he had knocked out ; and here it is commanded that the Jewish slave should not be ruled over with rigour, which he would have been, if made to work beyond his strength, or too long at a time, or without sufficient food or other comforts. So that you see, that though the Jews were allowed to have slaves, they were under very strict regulations to treat them with kindness ; and all, except the heathen slaves, were set at full liberty in the year of jubilee. Those who had kind masters often returned to live with them a second time ; when they went to the judges, told them they wished to live with their good old masters all their days, and then, in token of it, had their ears bored with an awl





against the door-posts of their master's house ; when they became his property till another year of jubilee, which probably few ever lived to see. The account of this ceremony you will find in the twenty-first chapter of Exodus.

THE TWENTY-SIXTH CHAPTER OF LEVITICUS.

Commandments, Promises, and Threatenings.

“These are the statutes and judgments and laws, which the Lord made between him and the children of Israel in Mount Sinai by the hand of Moses.”—Ver. 46.

Here God *commands* Israel to make no more idols, as they did the golden calf—to keep holy the Sabbath-day—and to mind divine worship.

If they will mind his commands, he *promises* them fine harvests ; for it is God Almighty that can send or withhold the rain that makes the corn to grow ; and he promises them peace among themselves, for the hearts of all men are in his hand ; and he promises to protect them from wild beasts, which in those parts often do much harm ; and he promises them victory over all their enemies ; and he promises them so much store in their barns, that they should remove the old to make room for the new ; and he promises them the great privilege of Divine worship, and his presence and blessing with everything. See how many and great are God's promises to those who love and fear him !

But, if Israel disobey God's commands, then they must *expect* to feel his displeasure ; and here he threatens them with terror, consumption, burning, ague, destruction by enemies, slavery, wild beasts, pestilence, famine, so that there shall be so little bread to bake, that ten women shall bake the bread of ten families in one oven, which every family has hitherto used for itself ; in fact, he threatens them with total desolation, and ruin, and captivity.

We shall hereafter see that they did not obey God ; that they





were carried away captive ; that they then at last repented ; and that God, as he promised, remembered the covenant of their ancestors, and restored them again to their land.

THE TWENTY-SEVENTH CHAPTER OF LEVITICUS.

Vows.

“ And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, When a man shall make a singular vow, the persons shall be for the Lord by thy estimation.”—Vers. 1, 2.

A *vow* was a promise made to God of doing some good thing hereafter. The meaning of the text above, which begins the chapter, is this : if any one has vowed to give any person or thing to the Lord, if he wishes to ransom it, or to give its value instead, for the benefit of the house of God ; the priest, in that case, may set a value upon it, and take that value in money instead of the person or thing vowed.

You will read here of the value of a male, and of a female, and of a beast, and of a house, and of a field ; for all these, a man might, perhaps, vow to give to God.

But why should he so vow or promise ? and what need had God of them ?

I will tell you. A man might have received some very great kindness from God, beyond the bounty and goodness which we all receive every day. Under the fresh recollection of this, with a heart full of gratitude, he might say, “ O, what shall I do in return, to show how much I thank God ? I will give my servant for the service of his house for ever : there he shall work and help the priests. Or, I will give a bullock as a proof of my gratitude, and it shall be offered on his altar.” So, when Jacob went into Mesopotamia, he vowed to God a tenth part of his estates ; that is, as if a man who has ten fields, should vow one of them,





which would be the tenth; or have a hundred cattle, should vow ten of them, which would also be the tenth, and he promised to offer it at Bethel to the honour of God.

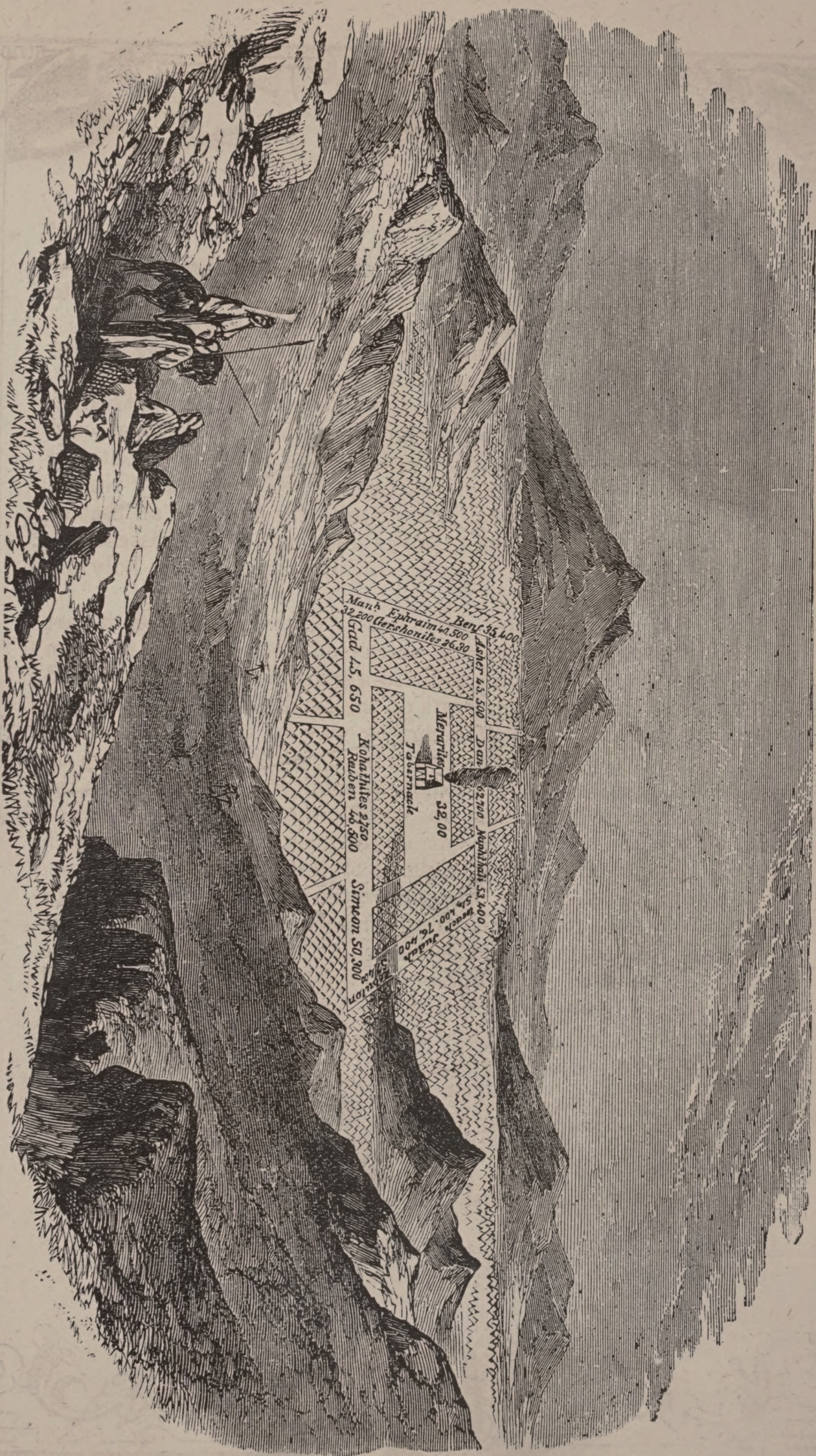
Now, a man, when he thought more about it, might have wished that he had not vowed what he had—perhaps even a daughter. In that case, a value was set upon the vow, and he paid that value.

There was, however, a more rigid vow, in which nothing could be redeemed; but the things vowed were to be devoted entirely and at once to the service of the Lord. So we read—"No devoted thing that a man shall devote unto the Lord, of all that he hath, both of man and beast, and of the field of his possessions, shall be sold or redeemed: every devoted thing is most holy unto the Lord."

We read in this chapter about *tithes*. These were a tenth part of what the earth brought forth, which God commanded to be given to the support of religion; and also a tenth part of the flocks and herds which fed upon the fruits of the earth. You will read in the thirty-second verse of a curious way of taking this tenth: "And concerning the tithe of the herd, or of the flock, even of whatsoever *passeth under the rod*, the tenth shall be holy unto the Lord." Now, when a man was to give the tithe of his sheep or calves to God, he was to shut up his flock in one fold, in which there was one narrow door, capable of letting out one at a time. The owner, about to give the tenth to the Lord, stood by the door with a rod in his hand, the end of which was dipped in vermilion—a very red colour, or red ochre, with which you sometimes see sheep now marked; the mothers of these lambs or calves stood without: the door being opened, the young ones ran out to join themselves to their dams; and as they passed out the owner stood with his rod over them, and counted one, two, three, four, five, and so on to *ten*; and when the tenth came, he touched it with the coloured rod, by which it was distinguished to be the tithe calf, sheep, &c.; and whether poor or lean, perfect or blemished, that was received as the proper tithe. This is the account the Jews give of taking the tithe, and it is believed to be correct.



ENCAMPMENT OF THE ISRAELITES





MOUNT HOREB



NUMBERS,

WHICH MEANS

THE BOOK OF NUMBERING THE ISRAELITES.

THE FIRST AND SECOND CHAPTERS OF NUMBERS.

The Numbering of the Tribes of Israel.

“And the Lord spake unto Moses in the wilderness of Sinai, in the Tabernacle of the congregation, on the first day of the second month, in the second year after they were come out of the land of Egypt, saying,

“Take ye the sum of all the congregation of the children of Israel, after their families, by the house of their fathers, with the number of their names, every male by their polls;

“From twenty years old and upward, all that are able to go forth to war in Israel: thou and Aaron shalt number them by their armies.”—Chap. i. 1—3.

IN the second year after Israel had come out of Egypt, Moses was ordered to number the people. Did not God, then, know how many there were without numbering? and could he not have told Moses the number, without his taking the trouble to count them? Yes; he certainly knew every man, and the heart of every man, for he knows all things; and he could have told Moses had he pleased; but he wished this ceremony to be gone through, that Israel might be more impressed with what it was to teach them.





They had greatly increased in numbers, and God would now prove to them how he had kept his word to Abraham, that he should be the father of a very numerous posterity. They were so unbelieving, as by this time you must well know, that they would hardly have thought it possible they were so numerous, had Moses only told them their number ; and so he was ordered to count them, that they might see for themselves.

What a wonderful increase was here ! You must well remember that when Jacob's sons went down into Egypt there were only *seventy* souls ; and, now, about two hundred and fifteen years afterwards, the people are indeed "as the stars of heaven for multitude."

They had also murmured and sinned against God ; so that he had resolved that they should never be put in possession of the promised land of Canaan, but that their children only should have it. These would then know how true was the word of God, when, at the end of thirty-eight years, they should find that there were but *three* left out of this large number, now amounting to six hundred and twenty-five thousand eight hundred and fifty men, reckoning those above twenty years of age ; for at that period they were ordered to be counted again.

Another reason for this numbering of the people was to set them in proper order, so that, as they were now so very numerous, they might know how to march through the wilderness, which they were otherwise likely to do in great confusion, like as a mob of *sheep* compared with a regular army.

Yet a further reason is clearly understood, in the command to count all those only that were "able to go forth to war in Israel." For Israel were very timid, and they would feel more courage when they knew how strong they were ; though all their numbers would have been nothing, if God had not protected them ; for the Canaanites were much more numerous than they, when they entered into the land to drive them out : yet as God was not with that idolatrous people, to protect them, they often fled before a few handfuls of Israelites.

Every man by their *polls*, means by the number of their *heads*. The *third* and *fourth* chapters contain an account of the num





bering of the Levites, and of what each was to do, in taking care of the Tabernacle, which was solely intrusted to the Levites; and the *fifth* chapter repeats for the forgetful Israelites, some former laws about the leper, which we have already read. We therefore pass on to the sixth chapter.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER OF NUMBERS.

The Law concerning Nazarites.

“This is the law of the Nazarite who hath vowed, and of his offering unto the Lord for his separation.”—Ver. 21.

A Nazarite means a *separated person*,—that is, one who separates himself from the affairs of the world, to be entirely employed in the service of God.

Under the ancient law of Moses, there were persons who made peculiar vows to become Nazarites. When this was the case, *the Nazarite would not allow himself to drink wine prepared in any way*; for the sacred command respecting the Nazarite was, “He shall separate himself from wine and strong drink, and shall drink no vinegar of wine, or vinegar of strong drink, neither shall he drink any liquor of grapes, nor eat moist grapes, or dried. All the days of his separation shall he eat nothing that is made of the vine tree, from the kernels even to the husk.” The reason of this was, that his understanding might be quite clear to meditate on God Almighty’s goodness, and that he might be the fitter for praise and prayer to God.

The Nazarite *never shaved his head, but let his hair grow*. So God commanded: “All the days of the vow of his separation there shall no razor come upon his head.” He was not to cut off his hair in any way; for, at the end of the time fixed by his vow, he was to cut off the hair; and as he could not offer his own body,—for God did not require that,—he offered his hair that he cut





off, and put it in the fire on the altar of the Lord : this was a sign by which he would show that he belonged to the Lord.

The Nazarite was also *not to enter any house in which there was a dead corpse*, for that was defiling ; *nor was he to be present AT ANY FUNERAL*. This is what is meant in those words, "All the days that he separateth himself unto the Lord *he shall come at no DEAD BODY*. He shall not make himself unclean for his father, or for his mother, for his brother, or for his sister, when they die," which he would have done had he touched their dead bodies.

The vows of the Nazarites sometimes lasted for all their lives, but some only for as short a time as eight days.

When the time was over, the priest brought the person to the door of the temple, who there offered to the Lord a he-lamb for a burnt-offering, a she-lamb for a sacrifice of expiation or removing guilt, and a ram for a peace-offering. He also offered loaves and cakes, with wine. When all was done, the priest, or some one beside, shaved the head of the Nazarite at the door of the Tabernacle, and burnt his hair, for the reasons before-mentioned, on the fire of the altar. Then the priest put into the hands of the Nazarite the shoulder of the ram which had been roasted, with a loaf and a cake, which the Nazarite put back into the priest's hands, who offered them to the Lord. From this time the Nazarite might again drink wine, and his vow was finished.

I have told you before, my dear young reader, that these ceremonies were types or representations of persons and things—as pictures represent and describe the shape of a house, or the face of a friend ; that they were to teach us something more important than themselves ; and all this form about the Nazarite is meant to show us, that if we would separate ourselves for the service of God, as every Christian ought to do, we should "live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world."



THE SEVENTH CHAPTER OF NUMBERS.

The Offerings of the Tribes to the Tabernacle.

- “And it came to pass on the day that Moses had fully set up the Tabernacle, and had anointed it, and sanctified it, and all the instruments thereof, both the altar and all the vessels thereof, and had anointed them, and sanctified them ;
- “That the princes of Israel, heads of the house of their fathers, who were the princes of the tribes, and were over them that were numbered, offered.”—Vers. 1, 2.

We have read before about the building of the Tabernacle, and the duties of the various officers belonging to it. Here we have something more about it ; and this chapter gives us an account of the liberal offering which God put into the hearts of all the princes, or chief men of the tribes, to present for the use of the Tabernacle, after having probably collected some of what they gave from amongst the people.

They first presented “six covered wagons, and twelve oxen ; a wagon for two of the princes, and for each one an ox : and they brought them before the Tabernacle.” As their other presents were very handsome, these wagons were no doubt the best of their kind, that they might be fit for the service of the Tabernacle. But what did they want with wagons ? Why, you know that the children of Israel moved about from place to place in the wilderness, and that then they had to take down the Tabernacle, and move all its materials with them. You must recollect that there were persons called Levites, who were appointed to carry the materials : so Moses divided the wagons among them accordingly. To the Gershonites, or sons of Gershon, who had to carry the lighter things, such as the curtains and hangings, he gave *two wagons*, and *two yoke of oxen* ; when they had loaded these, they must carry the rest, if any remained, upon their shoulders. The Merarites, that had the heavy carriage, or such things as were





more solid and weighty,—such as the boards, and pillars, and sockets,—had *four wagons*, and *four yoke of oxen*; yet much must have remained for them to carry upon their backs, so that they were not to be idle; but they were not at the same time to be overburdened. The weight of which they had to take care was very great, for the silver sockets only weighed a hundred talents, which was about four tons, and one ton only is twenty hundred weight,—every hundred weight, so called, being one hundred and twelve pounds. These four tons were enough to load four wagons that were drawn by but one yoke of oxen a-piece; two oxen having quite as much as they could draw with one ton. Each socket being a talent weight, which is about a man's burthen, probably they carried those on their backs, and put the boards and pillars into the wagons.

Thus, you see, the wagons served to ease the Levites of their burthens; and being covered wagons, they would better protect some of the materials of the Tabernacle, that needed to be kept from the sun and weather.

“But unto the sons of Kohath, he” (Moses) “gave none” (no wagons), “because the service of the sanctuary belonging unto them was that they should bear upon their shoulders.” For in the fourth chapter we have read, that they had the charge of the ark, table, candlestick, altars, and the like, which were to be carried upon their *shoulders*; for those *sacred things* were not to be drawn *by beasts*.

The princes offered, besides other things, during twelve days, one prince after the other,—that is, one every day for each tribe, according to the marching order of their standards; and their offerings were the same each day. This was as God commanded, that each tribe might have equal honour in contributing.

The offering of each prince was as follows: “One silver charger,” or dish, perhaps, to hold the meat offering, the weight whereof was one hundred and thirty shekels; “which was above sixty-one ounces,” and in value more than **eighty dollars**. “One silver bowl of seventy shekels, after the shekel of the sanctuary,” or after the standard weight of the sanctuary; a standard being kept there to weigh the shekel exactly. This bowl was either to





hold the drink-offering, or receive the blood of the sacrifices, weighed above thirty-three ounces, and was worth almost forty dollars. "Both of them were full of fine flour, mingled with oil for a meat-offering." There was also "one spoon of ten shekels of gold, full of incense," intended for the service of the golden altar.

Besides the before-named, there were added "one young bullock, one ram, one lamb of the first year for a burnt-offering. And for a sacrifice of peace-offerings, two oxen, five rams, five he-goats, five lambs of the first year." Part of these offerings were to be eaten with their friends,—expressing that the service of God may be connected with the moderate enjoyment of providential comforts; and part of them were to point to Christ, the great sacrifice for sin, through whom, whatever we offer to God acceptably, must be received.

In all, then, there were twelve large silver dishes, as many silver cups, and as many golden spoons, for the service of the altar; besides the animals.

"This was the dedication of the altar after that it was anointed."

All this shows us that we ought to support the worship of God, and to do all that we can to keep it up in the world,—and that cheerfully and willingly, and as far as we can liberally.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER OF NUMBERS.

Directions about the Levites.

From the First to the Fourteenth Verse.

- "And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying,
"Take the Levites from among the children of Israel, and cleanse them.
"And thus shalt thou do unto them, to cleanse them: sprinkle water of purifying upon them, and let them shave all their flesh, and let them wash their clothes, and so make themselves clean."—Vers. 5—7.





By this time you must have read enough about the Levites without being told any more who they were.

Aaron is now told to light the seven lamps of the golden candlestick, and then to proceed to prepare the Levites for their work.

This he was to do in this way :—He was to sprinkle water upon them, and they were to shave themselves, and wash their clothes. All this meant that the ministers of religion must be good men, and not wicked men : good men being represented as purifying themselves, by God's help, from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit ; or, of the disposition as well as of the practice ; and evil men as being defiled, because they love and live in sin. As by God's help, in giving us life and strength, we can wash our hands and our clothes ; so then you see by his help we may become what are called holy men—men who love and serve God.

Now, God having spared all the first-born children of the Israelites, when he destroyed those of the Egyptians, just before the Israelites came out of Egypt, he desired that the first-born of "man and beast" should always afterwards be given to him ; but instead of the first-born children, he accepted of the Levites.

The children of Israel were therefore to be gathered together on this occasion, and they were to put their hands upon the Levites, and the Levites were to be offered by Aaron to do the service of the Lord. And there was to be a sin-offering and a burnt-offering to make atonement to the Lord ; for, as all that men do is mixed with sin, these sacrifices—as you have before been told—were to show that pardon through the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ, was at all times necessary, before God could be pleased with the offerings of his servants.

"Thus," said the Lord to Moses, "shalt thou separate the Levites from among the children of Israel : and the Levites shall be mine."

The rest of the chapter is merely to tell us that "Moses, and Aaron, and all the congregation of the children of Israel, did to the Levites according unto all that the Lord commanded Moses concerning the Levites."





THE NINTH CHAPTER OF NUMBERS.

The Pillar of Cloud and Fire.

“And on the day that the Tabernacle was reared up, the cloud covered the Tabernacle, namely, the tent of the testimony: and at even there was upon the Tabernacle as it were the appearance of fire, until the morning.”—Ver. 15.

In what has been said on the thirteenth and fourteenth chapters of Exodus, you have already read something about the pillar of cloud and fire.

This chapter contains little but what you may understand without any help, as it is very plain and easy, and speaks of the keeping of the passover, after a year should have passed away from the first keeping of it; and if any person should be unable to keep it on the exact day appointed, which was the fourteenth day of the first month, because he was reckoned unclean, or for any other reason,—then another day was fixed for him, and others in the like case, to keep it also, which was the fourteenth day of the second month, or a month after; but nobody was to neglect it on any account, or he was to bear his sin, and God would punish him.

This was to teach you and me that we are to do all the religious duties which God commands us; and that if we neglect them, he will certainly punish us.

Then we have a further account of the pillar of cloud and fire; and we are told that as soon as the Tabernacle was put up, this cloud rested over it, something like the clouds which you may have seen resting in the air on a fine day over the top of some high hill, and perhaps shining with bright colours on the side next the sun, and looking dark on the other. “So it was alway: the cloud covered the Tabernacle by day, and the appearance of fire by night.”





This cloud was meant to show the Israelites that God was present in a particular manner in his Tabernacle. You know that he is present everywhere, so that we can never get out of God's sight: but this was a token given to Israel only, to show that he was present with them, not only to *see* them and to *hear* them, but to *protect* them.

This cloud was also a sign for the people to follow, as armies follow a flag which guides them; for, "when the cloud was taken up from the Tabernacle, then, after that, the children of Israel journeyed, and at the commandment of the Lord they pitched," or put down their tents to dwell in: "as long as the cloud abode upon the Tabernacle, they rested in the tents."

So, if the cloud moved, they marched: and if it rested, they rested, whether by night or by day: for by day it was dark, and they could see it; and it, perhaps, even cast a shadow over all the army, to keep it from the burning sun; and by night it was bright, and served as a bright moon to guide all their steps, and keep them from the confusion which such an army must have fallen into without such an aid. So, "whether it were two days, or a month, or a year, that the cloud tarried," or rested, "upon the Tabernacle, remaining thereon, the children of Israel abode in their tents, and journeyed not: but when it was taken up they journeyed. At the commandment of the Lord they rested in the tents, and at the commandment of the Lord they journeyed: they kept the charge of the Lord, at the commandment of the Lord by the hand of Moses." Probably, some one was also on the watch, to see the motions of the cloud night and day, as soldiers are kept as sentinels, and take turns with each other; and the children of Israel were also always ready to march at a moment's notice, as we ought always to be ready to obey the will of God, which we also often learn from his holy word; for this world is to us what the wilderness was to the Israelites. It is not our rest; but we must prepare for another. A good God gives us his Bible, to be a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our paths; and so we are guided on in the way to a better country—that is, a heavenly, where all who serve God as his real people do, shall at last arrive. In this sense we sometimes sing—





ISRAELITES GATHERING MANNA.





"Guide me, O thou great Jehovah,
Pilgrim through this barren land;
I am weak, but thou art mighty,
Hold me with thy powerful hand:
Bread of Heaven,
Feed me till I want no more.

"Open thou the crystal fountain,
Whence the healing streams do flow;
Let the *fiery cloudy pillar*
Lead me all my journey through.
Strong Deliverer,
Be thou still my strength and shield."

THE TENTH CHAPTER OF NUMBERS.

The Silver Trumpets, and March from Sinai.

"Make thee two trumpets of silver; of a whole piece shalt thou make them: that thou mayest use them for the calling of the assembly, and for the journeying of the camps."

The children of Israel had pitched their tents before Mount Sinai for about a year, and they were now expected to remove; but, before they marched, they were commanded to make two silver trumpets; these, when both were blown, were to call the whole congregation together; and when only one was blown, it was to call the chiefs together. When any alarm was blown, or, instead of one long and continued sound, the notes of one trumpet were made to rattle, the people were to march; and each time the rattling alarm sounded, making a noise like *tara-tan-tara*, different bodies were to march one after another, so as to prevent jostling and confusion. If the alarm was to prepare for war, then a *tara-tan-tara* was blown on two trumpets.





These trumpets were also to be blown in the day of "gladness," or whenever Israel might triumph over their enemies; on "solemn days," or festivals, as the Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacle; in the beginnings of their months, especially on the first day of the seventh month, which was a feast of blowing of trumpets: but you have been already told that nobody now knows exactly why this feast was kept: and lastly, these trumpets were to be blown over the "burnt-offerings," and over the "sacrifices" of their "peace-offerings," as expressing joy for the acceptance of them; and especially when they had, by faith, a view of the great sacrifice of Christ, which these offerings were intended to represent.

There were only two trumpets, for that was the number of the priests, who were Eleazar and Ithamar, the sons of Aaron; and the priests only were to blow these trumpets. In Solomon's time there were a hundred and twenty priests, and then there were as many trumpets.

And now the cloud moved, and all Israel moved. "And they first took their journey according to the commandment of the Lord by the hand of Moses:" or, as we read in the ninth chapter—"At the commandment of the Lord the children of Israel journeyed, and at the commandment of the Lord they pitched;" that is, set up their tents:—"as long as the cloud abode upon the Tabernacle, they rested in their tents:" Moses having given them God's command; and as we give things *with the hand*, it is here said to be given by the hand of Moses.

We may suppose that the cloud had stood for some time after it "was taken up from off the Tabernacle of the testimony," which was that part of the Tabernacle where the ark of the testimony stood, even the most holy place. There must have been a great deal of work, to take down all the tents, and pack up all the goods; but, as every family managed their own, the work was not so long in doing as we might at first suppose.

Here we have their order of march. "In the *first* place went the standard," or colours, "of the camp of the children of *Judah*;" just as our soldiers often march with flags flying to distinguish the different **army corps**; and they had for their captain, "Nahshon, the son of Aminadab." Then there was the Tabernacle, borne





by the two families of the Levites, the sons of Gershon, and the sons of Merari, who were appointed to carry it. For this there were six wagons.

The *second* division was *Reuben's*, with its flag flying, and its captain; and this was followed by the Kohathites, bearing the sacred furniture of the Tabernacle, and those who had gone before with the Tabernacle, set it up against these came with the furniture.

Then, *third* in order after the ark, followed *Ephraim's* numerous host; and

Last, "the standard of the camp of the children of Dan set forward, which was the re-re-ward," or *gathering body*, "of all the camps throughout their hosts." These took with them what were left of the rest—some being unfit to mix with the body, as were the unclean, and some were too feeble to go first, so they were allowed to march behind, and get forward at a slower rate.

What a noble army was here! How grand a sight it must have been to have seen it marching! For Judah's camp had a hundred and eighty-six thousand four hundred men fit for war; and Reuben's, an hundred and fifty-one thousand four hundred and fifty warlike men; and Ephraim's, one hundred and eight thousand one hundred men fit for soldiers; and Dan's, one hundred and fifty-seven thousand six hundred strong men; besides the Levites and others, that were behind. Would not you have liked to have seen the flags flying over this great multitude, which made in all *more than half a million* of men, besides women and children, and priests? But I should have liked to have seen the sign of God's presence with them. "What was that?" Why, the pillar of cloud and fire, by which the Almighty guided them. So many people having the token of God's favour, ought to have thought themselves the most happy people in the world.

Moses having been visited by a relation of the name of Hobab, now persuaded him to go on to the land of Canaan, and promised him that he should share in all the privileges of the Israelites; for good men, who know what a blessing it is to enjoy the protection and favour of God, are always happy when others share with them in their enjoyments.





We do not find any reply that Hobab here made to Moses, and therefore we hope his silence gave consent, and he did not leave them; although at the first he refused to go, and wished to return to his own country, and live among the Midianites.

The Israelites went this time three days' journey from Sinai, "and the cloud rested in the wilderness of Paran."

The chapter concludes by telling us the words that Moses used to repeat when the ark set forward. He said, "Rise up, Lord, and let thine enemies be scattered; and let them that hate thee flee before thee"—that is, show thy power and glory in scattering the enemies of Israel, as the sun when he *rises* scatters the darkness of night, so that it is no more seen.

And we are also told what words Moses used when the ark rested: he said, "Return, O Lord! unto the many thousands of Israel;" by which he prayed that the presence of God might be with them, as it had been before.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER OF NUMBERS.

The murmuring Israelites fed with Quails.

"And the mixt multitude that was among them fell a-lusting; and the children of Israel also wept again, and said, Who shall give us flesh to eat?"

"We remember the fish which we did eat in Egypt freely; the cucumbers, and the melons, and the leeks, and the onions, and the garlic.

"But now our soul is dried away; there is nothing at all, besides this manna, before our eyes."—Vers. 4—6.

The people had for some time behaved themselves pretty well, and nothing very wrong is related about them since they committed the sin of worshipping a golden calf, but here we find them complaining.





What were their complaints about? When we consider how kindly God guided their camp, what good victuals they had, and what good company, and what care was taken of them in their marches, that their feet should not swell, nor their clothes wear, of which you will read in Deuteronomy,—what cause could they have to complain?

Why, it is hard to guess: but some think they complained of the weather; and some, of the way; and some, of the length of the journey; while others think that they complained that the journey was not long enough, and that they ought at once to have gone on till they got into Canaan. Good Mr. Henry says, "Those that are of a fretful, discontented spirit will always find something or other to quarrel with, though the circumstances of their outward condition be ever so favourable."

Such conduct is very ungrateful to God, and very displeasing to him; and so he consumed the ringleaders of these murmurers as he did Nadab and Abihu: "And when the people complained, it displeased the Lord; and the Lord heard it; and his anger was kindled; and the fire of the Lord burnt among them, and consumed them that were in the uttermost parts of the camp. And the people cried unto Moses; and when Moses prayed unto the Lord, the fire was quenched. And he called the name of the place Taberah, which means *a burning*; because the fire of the Lord burnt among them." And, by giving the spot this name, they would remember what they brought upon themselves by murmuring; and others would hear and fear, and take warning, not to sin as they did, lest they should smart as they did.

But what a provoking people were Israel! How fast one offence followed another! They soon murmured again. When they left Egypt, "a mixt multitude went up also with them;" some perhaps being disposed to leave their country because it was wasted by plagues, and some hoping to benefit by sharing in the prosperity of Israel. These people, however, did not fear God, and they "*fell a-lusting*," or earnestly wishing for what they thought better food, and for their own country. And the children of Israel followed their bad example, and they began to talk about what nice things they used to get in Egypt,—fish, and cucumbers,





and melons, and leeks, and onions, and garlic,—and to complain of the manna. You may wonder that they reckoned leeks, and onions, and garlic, which is like onions, among their good things which they so greatly desire; they are, however, very nice things in that part of the world, and so richly flavoured, that ours will give scarcely any notion of them. But what were all these good things to this silly people, when they were in Egypt in a state of slavery? They paid dearly for them at the price of their liberty. They should have thought of the other things which they had there,—of their brick-kilns, where they had such hard labour, and of their cruel task-masters, that were set over them, to make them manufacture bricks without straw. And, with all this, they talked as if they had lived in Egypt like princes, and spoke of the manna as if it was the most unpleasant food in the world.

A traveller of the name of **Burckhardt** long ago discovered a food among the Arabs, a people in that country where the Israelites travelled, which they call *Mann*, and which he thinks was the manna. It is true that that food is said to have come down from heaven; but so does this, for it is always found in years when there has been plenty of rain; and in the month of June, it drops like dew from the thorns of a tree called the Tamarisk, and covers the ground about it. This food is gathered before sunrise, when it has a substance that can be taken up by the hand, but it dissolves and becomes like water as soon as the sun shines upon it. The Arabs boil it, strain it through a coarse piece of cloth, and put it into leathern skins; in this way they preserve it till the next year, and use it as they do honey, to dip their bread into. The colour of this food is a dirty yellow, and its taste is very fine and *as sweet as honey*, and considered by the Arabs as *the greatest dainty which their country affords*.

Now, it is very possible that this is the kind of food which God miraculously multiplied for the people of Israel, and that he gave them this “greatest dainty,” and yet they were not satisfied. If it was this food, it must have been greatly multiplied, because the Arabs cannot find more than five or *six hundred pounds* even in a plentiful year; whereas, I have before told you, that the Hebrew camp wanted not less than ninety-four thousand four hundred and





thirty-six bushels of this food every day ; and this was continued for *forty years*, whether those years were *wet* or *dry*.

Now Moses heard the people weeping, and God Almighty was angry with them, and so was he. And Moses prayed to God to know what he should do ; and he said he was not their father, that he could provide meat for them all as he could for a little family.

And God told him to choose seventy of the *elders*, or *old men* of Israel, and he would give them a portion of his spirit of wisdom, and they should share with him in the burthen of managing such an unruly people.

God also promised to let the Israelites have as much meat as they desired ; but as they were so discontented he would punish them severely, so that the meat he would send them should come out at their "nostrils," and be "loathsome" to them,—meaning that it should surfeit them, and rise in their stomachs, and be offensive to their smell.

Moses wondered how they could get so much meat, and he said, "The people amongst whom I am, are six hundred thousand footmen ; and thou hast said, I will give them flesh, that they may eat a whole month. Shall the flocks and the herds be slain for them, to suffice them ; or shall all the fish of the sea be gathered together for them, to suffice them ?"—meaning, that if all the sheep, and goats, and bullocks, were slain, which they had for sacrifice, they would not last for a month ; and expressing surprise how so many fish, as seemed to him necessary, could be caught. He knew that God always kept his word, but he forgot at this moment how great was his power, and that he who miraculously sent bread could also send meat ; and he never thought that little fowls could be sent in such numbers as to cover the camp.

So God gave of Moses's spirit and skill to the elders ; and while Moses and the rest were about the Tabernacle, two of them, called Eldad and Medad, that were in the camp, prophesied ; and Joshua, the son of Nun, a servant or officer of Moses, not knowing that God had given them their wisdom, but supposing that they were taking too much upon themselves, as some others had done before, told Moses, and asked him to forbid them. But





Moses explained to him how it was, and he said, "Would God that all the Lord's people were prophets, and that the Lord would put his spirit upon them."

God also fulfilled his word about the meat. "And there went forth a wind from the Lord, and brought quails from the sea, and let them fall by the camp, as it were a day's journey on this side, and as it were a day's journey on the other side, round about the camp, and as it were two cubits high upon the face of the earth. And the people stood up all that day, and all that night, and all the next day, and they gathered the quails: he that gathered least gathered ten homers: and they spread them all abroad for themselves round about the camp. And while the flesh was yet between their teeth, ere it was chewed, the wrath of the Lord was kindled against the people, and the Lord smote the people with a very great plague."



Quails are a sort of partridges; they are often carried in flocks across the country, in those parts; and by a strong wind rising, they were obliged to go with the wind, and fell down, and were probably also knocked down by the people.

A day's journey in those hot and sandy countries is not far, for people cannot travel as they do here; but it is supposed that the quails might cover twenty miles of ground.

Two cubits high was about a yard deep, or half the height of a tall man; so that the birds were

either so thick upon the ground, or else only that height above it, and so were easily got.

An *homer* is about an ass load, or from six to $10\frac{1}{2}$ bushels, so that it must hold a great number of quails, and he that gathered least out of this large multitude of people, gathered not less than ten homers, or from 60 to 105 bushels of the quails.





This seems incredible, but the word of God is proved well to be true. Had God wanted to have made those quails for the purpose, we know that he could have done it, as he can do all things: but as there are very great numbers of quails indeed, in those countries, he had only to command his wind to blow, and force them in flocks to the camp of Israel, and there they must go. And history tells us, that when there was no such miracle, it happened once in Italy, within a month, and in the space of five miles, that a hundred thousand quails were taken every day.

And God kept his word in punishing the Israelites.

So Moses called the place where this happened by a name that would ever afterwards make the Israelites remember their conduct to their shame: and he called the name of that place Kibroth-hattaavah—that is, “the graves of lust,” because there they buried the people that lusted.

It is likely that their death was brought on by gluttony, in eagerly eating too much of what they had so impatiently desired; and if so, the name of the place was as a great monument over this large burial-ground, on which was written, “THE GLUTTONS’ GRAVE!”

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER OF NUMBERS.

Miriam's Leprosy.

“And Miriam and Aaron spake against Moses, because of the Ethiopian woman whom he had married; for he had married an Ethiopian woman.

“And they said, Hath the Lord indeed spoken only by Moses? hath he not spoken also by us? and the Lord heard it.”—Vers. 1, 2.

Poor Moses had need to have been a meek man, for his patience was continually tried, and if any excuse can at all be made for ill humour, it was enough to put any body out of temper to have been plagued as he was.





You remember to have read of his sister Miriam, and the name of his brother Aaron must now be well known to you. These had some quarrel with Moses about his wife. They called her an Ethiopian woman, or a black-a-moor; but she was indeed an Arabian. You may recollect that her name was Zipporah, and that she was the daughter of Reuel, priest of Midian, sometimes called Raguel, and sometimes Jethro. Now, he was a Midianite, and the Midianites were descended from Abraham, and children of his wife Keturah, as you may see in the second chapter of Exodus, and in the twenty fifth chapter of Genesis; and some of them were inhabitants of some parts of Arabia; so that she would have been called with more propriety an Arabian, rather than an Ethiopian.

We do not know what she affronted Miriam and Aaron about, but it seems they were greatly offended with her. And then they vented their anger against Moses, and expressed their doubts whether God had engaged him more than them to be the commander of Israel.

Moses seems to have taken no notice of this affront, unkind as it was in a brother and sister, when he was so much troubled by a discontented people. But God heard what they said, for he hears everything that we say, and knows everything that we think.

And God spoke from the pillar of the cloud, and desired Moses and Aaron, and Miriam, to come out of their tents; and he spoke to them before the door of the Tabernacle, and told them that he was used to speak to prophets by visions and dreams, but Moses was not so, for with him he spoke mouth to mouth,—that is, he spoke as freely as we do when we speak mouth to mouth, or, as we sometimes say, face to face.

And now the cloud withdrew, and Miriam was smitten with that dreadful disorder of which I have told you so much, called the *Leprosy*; and she was white as snow, being covered with white scales, common in that complaint.

And Aaron was very sorry for his sister, for he had been as guilty as she; only, as her name was first mentioned, it is supposed that she began the quarrel. And he begged earnestly of Moses, that he would ask of God to take away his sister's leprosy.



BANKS OF THE JORDAN.





THE SPIES RETURNING.



Moses, too, was sorry for Miriam, though she had so ill used him, and like a kind brother he was ready to forgive her ; and he “cried unto the Lord, saying, Heal her now, O God, I beseech thee.” “And the Lord said unto Moses, If her father had but spit in her face,”—which among the Israelites was a sign of great anger and disgrace,—“should she not be ashamed seven days?” and not dare to go into her father’s presence. “Let her be shut out from the camp seven days, and after that let her be received in again.” “And Miriam was shut out of the camp seven days : and the people journeyed not till Miriam was brought in again.

“And afterward the people removed from Hazeroth, and pitched in the wilderness of Paran.”

THE THIRTEENTH AND FOURTEENTH CHAPTERS OF NUMBERS.

The Twelve Spies sent to Canaan.

“And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying,
“Send thou men, that they may search the land of Canaan, which I give unto the children of Israel : of every tribe of their fathers shall ye send a man ; every one a ruler among them.”—
Chap. xiii. 1, 2.

The people of Israel, though God had been so kind to them, did not seem yet wholly inclined to believe all that he promised. So they wished to send somebody into Canaan to know if it was a country worth having. God therefore told Moses to satisfy them, though certainly they did not deserve to have their curiosity satisfied ; for they ought rather to have believed what he said by his faithful servant Moses,—whose words had so often come true,—than any report that spies might bring.

Accordingly Moses chose a man out of every tribe : and, as there were twelve tribes, so of course there were twelve men sent as spies to see the land. I must tell you that a spy means a person who goes slyly to look at an enemy’s army or country ;





for, had it been known that these men were in Canaan to see if it was worth taking, and likely to be conquered, the Canaanites would soon have killed them, and the Israelites would have been no wiser for their journey.

“And Moses sent them to spy out the land of Canaan, and said unto them, Get you up this way southward, and go up into the mountain: and see the land, what it is; and the people that dwelleth therein, whether they be strong or weak, few or many; and what the land is that they dwell in, whether it be good or bad; and what cities they be that they dwell in, whether in tents or in strong holds; and what the land is, whether it be fat or lean, whether there be wood therein or not. And be ye of good courage, and bring of the fruit of the land.”

You must remember being told, in the third chapter of Exodus, that God promised that Moses should be the deliverer of Israel, and that they should yet possess a land flowing with milk and honey, or, in other words, full of fine herbs to feed cattle and make them give milk; and full of flowers, out of which bees might make plenty of honey. So now the spies were to see if Canaan was, indeed, such a country; whether the people were likely to fight boldly to defend it; and if they were more numerous than Israel; and if the soil was fat and rich, or lean and barren, bearing nothing to reward the labourer; and whether there was any wood to build habitations.

So the spies went all through the land from the south to the north. It is thought that they did not all go together; for then the Canaanites would have suspected them: but they went in several companies of two or three each, and so they passed very well for travellers.

“And they came unto the brook of Eshcol, and cut down from thence a branch with one cluster of grapes, and they bare it between two upon a staff; and they brought of the pomegranates and of the figs.” A traveller, who lived not many years ago, tells us that he saw grapes in the valley of Eshcol, the clusters of which weighed ten or twelve pounds, and another saw bunches at Damascus that weighed forty-five pounds. These grapes might be too large for one man to carry a great way in a warm country, or





they might have been so ripe that they were liable to be bruised to pieces if squeezed in the hands, and so they were carried hanging upon a staff, one end of which was on the shoulders of one man, and the other end on the shoulders of another man, just as our brewers' men carry a cask of beer between two.

The spies also brought pomegranates. This is a fine fruit, which grows in the country which the spies visited, then called Canaan, and now more commonly known by the name of Palestine, which I shall in future often call it, so that when I speak of Palestine, just remember it is the country that was formerly called Canaan. The pomegranate bears a red blossom like a rose, is about the size of a large apple, and, being full of juice, is very pleasant, and valuable in a hot country for quenching the thirst. This fruit being considered handsome in shape, part of the ornaments of the high priest's robe were made like it. You therefore read in the twenty-eighth chapter of Exodus what the Lord commanded Moses about Aaron's robe: "And beneath, upon the hem of it, thou shalt make pomegranates of blue, and of purple, and of scarlet, round about the hem thereof, and bells of gold between them, round about: a golden bell and a pomegranate, a golden bell and a pomegranate, upon the hem of the robe round about."

You know what a fig is, and the fig-tree grows very large in Palestine, and bears very fine fruit, which is soft, sweet, and nourishing.

"The spies returned from searching of the land, after forty days," and then they said to Moses, "We came unto the land whither thou sentest us, and surely it floweth with milk and honey; and this is the fruit of it," showing him the fine grapes, and the pomegranates, and the figs. Well, then, so far they found that what God had told them by the lips of Moses was quite true. Surely then they were ready to go and take the land. No; these cowardly spies went on to say, "Nevertheless, the people be strong that dwell in the land, and the cities are walled, and very great: and, moreover, we saw the children of Anak there." "And they brought up an evil report of the land which they had searched unto the children of Israel, saying, The land through which we have gone to search it, is a land that eateth up the inhabitants





thereof; and all the people that we saw in it are men of great stature. And there we saw the giants, the sons of Anak, which come of the giants: and we were in our own sight as grasshoppers, and so we were in their sight." This was a very alarming story, and frightened the Israelites. They began to think, how can we ever take such a country, where the people are so strong,—so well protected, in towns with thick and high walls all around their cities,—so tall that we are only little things by their side,—and where the land is the grave of the inhabitants, and eats them up, as the grave seems to swallow up the dead body that is shut up in it, the people dying in great numbers by war and pestilence.

Caleb, the spy of the tribe of Judah, gave, however, a very different account of the country; he "stilled the people before Moses, and said, Let us go up at once and possess it; for we are well able to overcome it."

But Israel, still a perverse people, began to cry like a number of little children, and they said, "Would God that we had died in the land of Egypt, or would God we had died in this wilderness." And they asked why God had brought them there; and at last they resolved that they would get another captain instead of Moses, and he should take them back into Egypt.

What a fine plight these people would have been in had they gone back to Egypt! But they never thought of that. Would not the Egyptians have made them worse slaves than ever, after they had lost their king, and their army, and their chariots and horses, in pursuing them? and would they not have taunted them for their folly?

Moses and Aaron were ashamed of them, and they fell on their faces before them all, and no doubt prayed earnestly to God in their behalf.

And Joshua the son of Nun, who had been the spy of the tribe of Ephraim, and Caleb, of whom mention has been made, rent their clothes, which the Jews always did in great trouble: "And they spake unto all the company of the children of Israel, saying, The land which we passed through to search it is an exceeding good land. If the Lord delight in us, then he will bring us into this land, and give it us: a land which floweth with milk and





honey. Only rebel not ye against the Lord, neither fear ye the people of the land; for they are bread for us," as easily to be consumed as bread is by eating; "their defence is departed from them," for God would not protect them as they were so very wicked a people; "and the Lord is with us, fear them not."

Now this was very kind, and encouraging, and civil language; but, instead of taking it as they ought, what do you think the people were about to do? Why they prepared to stone Caleb and Joshua, and would have killed them; but just at that moment "the glory of the Lord appeared in the Tabernacle" before them all, and so they were afraid of being dreadfully punished for their wickedness.

And, indeed, God resolved that he would punish them, and he said to Moses, "I will smite them with the pestilence, and disinherit them, so that they shall never possess the promised land, and I will make of thee a greater nation and mightier than they."

But Moses pleaded with God. And he said that the Egyptians would delight to learn that the people were all destroyed; and the other wicked nations would say that God had brought them so far, but could not take them into the land he promised to give them; and, therefore, he prayed that, as God was very long-suffering and merciful, he would pardon the people, as he had done before when they offended him.

So God heard the prayer of Moses, for he is a God that hears prayer, and he did not cut the people off directly, but he told him that none of them should ever enjoy the promised land, since they were so mistrustful of him, and only Caleb and Joshua, of the whole of them, should have possession in it; but having given a true report of the land, and trusted him to help them to take it, they should have the honour and happiness which the rest deserved never to enjoy.

And Moses and Aaron were commanded of the Lord to tell the people, "Your carcasses shall fall in this wilderness, and all that were numbered of you"—that is, when the people were numbered—"according to your whole number, from twenty years old and upwards, which have murmured against me." And they were also to tell them, that Caleb and Joshua were not to die in





the wilderness, and that the young Israelites should remain wandering about in the wilderness for forty years, till all their fathers were dead ; that is, as many years as the spies were days searching out the land ; so that they would always remember why it was that God kept them so long in the wilderness, because their fathers would not trust his word, and were afraid, on the report of the spies, of going into the land of Canaan. So they were to know God's "breach," or separation from, and punishment of them.

And, that the people might see that God would keep his word, he instantly punished the ten spies, who gave so ill a report of the promised land ; for "they died by the plague before the Lord."

The next morning, after the people had heard the news, how God had resolved to cut them off in the wilderness, and had cut off the spies, they were very sorry for what they had done, and they resolved to go and take the land. But God had told them that they should not, and so this conduct was just as much against his pleasure as that they had shown against going up. And Moses tried to reason with them, and to stop them, and he told them that now they could not prosper : "Go not up," said Moses, "for the Lord is not among you ; that ye be not smitten before your enemies."

But away the obstinate people marched up the mountain, by the way which the spies had before gone, and "the Amalekites came down, and the Canaanites, which dwelt in that hill, and smote them, and discomfited them." So you see that God's threatening was already in part fulfilled ; for, by their own headstrong foolishness, great numbers, perhaps many thousands, fell in this battle, instead of possessing the good land which God had promised.





THE FIFTEENTH CHAPTER OF NUMBERS.

The Sabbath-breaker Stoned to Death.

- “And while the children of Israel were in the wilderness, they found a man that gathered sticks upon the Sabbath day.
“And they that found him gathering sticks, brought him unto Moses and Aaron, and to all the congregation.
“And they put him in ward, because it was not declared what should be done to him.
“And the Lord said unto Moses, The man shall be surely put to death; all the congregation shall stone him with stones without the camp.
“And all the congregation brought him without the camp, and stoned him with stones, and he died; as the Lord commanded Moses.”—Vers. 32—36.
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After some more laws about sacrifices this chapter tells us the sad story just given above. You know that one of the ten commandments, which God gave to Israel, was, “Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy!—Six days shalt thou labor and do all thy work,—but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God; in it thou shalt not do any work.” But, in spite of this commandment, here is a man found gathering sticks on the Sabbath-day.

Now, the soul that did anything presumptuously and dared God, as it were, to punish sin, that soul was to be cut off from among his people. This seemed but a little sin, but it was enough to show that the sinner did not care for the commands of God, and so he was punished; for the Lord had expressly said to Moses, that he was to tell Israel that every one that defiled the Sabbath should surely be put to death. See this in Exodus; the thirty-first chapter, and the twelfth and following verses.

This offender was seized, taken to the congregation, accused of the crime by those who saw him do it, put into prison till Moses





and Aaron knew what God would have them do with him, and then he was brought out, and all the congregation were his executioners, to deter them from doing the like sin, when they saw the awful end of the Sabbath-breaker, and had themselves joined in putting him to death.

God does not now punish in such a way ; but the awful end of Sabbath-breakers is still sometimes a very striking warning to others. How many take their pleasure on this day, which is to be a day of rest from pleasure and business, that we may serve God, and mind nothing but our souls ! Children should not, then, on the Sabbath, mind any play, nor learn any lessons, but such as are to teach them about God and heaven ; or poor children in Mission-schools may spell, that they may be able to read their Bibles.

But to play at marbles or ball, or any other game, or to go out bird's-nesting, or to ramble for pleasure about the fields, among Sabbath-breakers, or to go on the water with pleasure-taking parties, **or to go to taverns and beer-gardens on the Lord's day**, is a most awful abuse of it, and, if not punished now, will be punished at last, if not repented of before God, and pardoned through Jesus Christ. How many Sabbath-breakers have been drowned by swimming, skating, or sliding, on that day, and how many killed by riding out for their pleasure on that day ! And though these accidents happen now and then at other times, yet they are not near so common, and those who die by them are not cut off in the sin of breaking God's holy day, which he has set apart for his own glory.

I will tell you a few terrible things which have happened on a Sabbath-day, as a warning to Sabbath-breakers.

"Some time ago, when a number of people were assembled together in Paris Gardens, to witness a bear-baiting, the scaffold on which many of them were standing suddenly broke down, and scores of people fell headlong on the ground ; eight were killed on the spot, and many more were so injured that their days were considerably shortened."

"At Risley, in Bedfordshire, where a great number of people met together in a chamber, to see a play, the floor giving way,





several of them fell down and expired immediately, and many others were severely wounded."

"Fourteen young men, in the winter, on the Lord's day, were playing at foot-ball upon the ice, on the river Trent, near to Gainsborough: all meeting together, in a scuffle, the ice suddenly broke, and every one of them sunk like lead, and perished in the water, no more to profane the Sabbath of the Lord."

Had a building fallen, while these unhappy creatures were worshipping God in sincerity, we might have hoped that they would have gone from earth to heaven; but what reason have we for any thing but fear respecting such wilful Sabbath-breakers, that they are gone from earth to hell? These examples, my dear young friend, should make you dread presumptuously disobeying the commands of the Almighty. "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy."

The Almighty's commands are not less for our good than for his glory; for though he has commanded us to keep the Sabbath-day, that we may serve him, yet, if we do not, we shall much injure ourselves. Multitudes, indeed, do not find this out till they die, but many do confess it before they die.

"*Thomas Savage*, a youth of about sixteen years of age, executed at Ratcliffe, confessed, at the place of execution, that the first sin he began with was Sabbath-breaking."

"*Margaret Clark*, executed in Surrey, declared that breaking the Sabbath was the cause of her ruin, and among her last words to the people, when she was going to be executed, were these:—"I desire you all not to spend the Lord's day idly; for it was Sabbath-breaking that was my first step to this wretchedness."

"*John Moores*, twenty-two years of age, executed at Chester, for breaking into a house and robbing it, said, as he was about to be hung,—'My friends, you are come to see a man die. I would advise you to take warning by me. The first beginning of my ruin was Sabbath-breaking; it led me into bad company; and from bad company to robbing gardens and orchards; and from gardens and orchards, to house-breaking; and that has brought me to this place. Many of you are young; and I, in an especial manner, warn you to beware of Sabbath-breaking.'"





I could tell you of a great number more who have died in the same way, and said the same kind of words. Then, dear young reader, let me again warn you,—“Remember the Sabbath-day to keep it holy.”

Before we finish this chapter, I must beg you to read the thirty-seventh verse to the end. You will there find an order given to the Israelites to put fringe upon their garments.

The Jews were God's own peculiar people, and they were thus to dress differently from other people, as, you know, they were also not to eat all the kinds of food eaten by other people; and these things were always to remind them, and show to others who they were—the peculiar people of God. If they were tempted to sin with the heathen, they would see, by the fringe on their garments, what would make them remember the holy commandments which God had given to them, just as a thread tied on our finger would make us remember anything which we would not forget.

We do not wear such garments as the Jews, but still we must always carry in our memories the commandments of God.

THE SIXTEENTH CHAPTER OF NUMBERS.

Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, swallowed up.

“And the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed them up, and their houses, and all the men that appertained unto Korah, and all their goods.

“They, and all that appertained to them, went down alive into the pit, and the earth closed upon them, and they perished from among the congregation.”—Vers. 32, 33.

Moses, you know, was appointed to be the leader of Israel, and Aaron, his brother, to be the High Priest. The tribe of Levi were to perform different services about the Tabernacle, such as preparing the sacrifices, cleansing the vessels, and many other things,





mentioned when we noticed the Tabernacle, its furniture, and priests. It seems, however, that some of these did not like that they should do such things, while Moses and Aaron were placed above them.

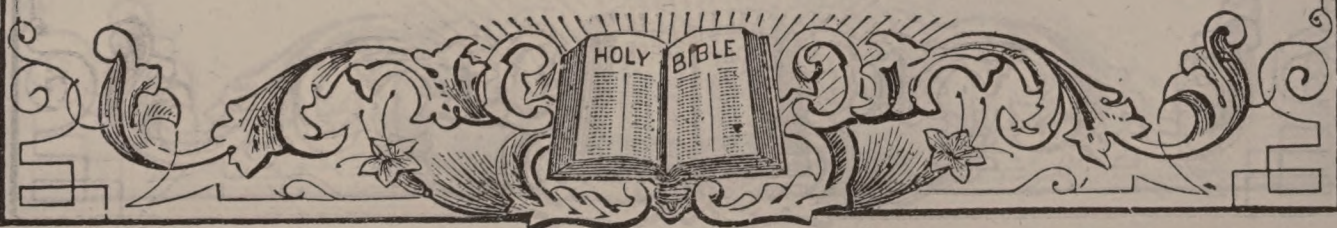
So one Korah said all the ill-natured things that he could against Moses, and he got Dathan and Abiram, who were some chiefs of the tribe of Reuben, to join him, and to rebel against the authority of Moses and Aaron. Then they got two hundred and fifty princes of the tribes to join them, who, probably, being princes or chiefs, were the *first-born*, and, before Aaron was raised to be High Priest, might probably have been priests themselves, as the first-born then were, but after that they were so no longer. And these told Moses and Aaron that they took too much upon them; for all the congregation were as holy as they, and had an equal right to their honours.

So Moses fell on his face, no doubt to pray to God, and Moses then told them to wait till the next day, and then, if Korah and the other rebels would take censers, or pans in which incense is burned, and offer incense before the Lord, they would see whom the Lord approved.

Having committed the matter to God, Dathan and Abiram were, at length, ordered to meet Moses and the people, to make the test, but they refused; and they charged Moses with taking them out of so nice a country as Egypt, and with intending to kill them, and to enslave the people by cheating them with false promises about the good land, and also with a design to put out their eyes, as leaders of the opposition against them.

Moses, though so meek a man, was very wroth, which was certainly very wrong, and he suffered for it afterwards, but yet to have such false things laid to his charge was very vexing.

"And Moses said unto Korah, Be thou and all thy company before the Lord, thou and they, and Aaron to-morrow; and take every man his censer, and put incense in them, and bring ye before the Lord every man his censer, two hundred and fifty censers; thou also, and Aaron, each of you his censer." So Korah and his party presumed to do so, and boldly stood in the door of the Tabernacle with Moses and Aaron.





And God's glory appeared. And God ordered Moses and Aaron to get out of the way, and he would destroy all the congregation in a moment. And Moses and Aaron, instead of feeling glad that God would so punish them, did not wish to be revenged, but fell on their faces and prayed to God for them, and begged that, as they had been misled by Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, who were therefore chiefly in fault, that God would spare them. So God heard their prayer. And he desired them to tell the congregation to come away from about the tents of the rebels, and have nothing to do with them, lest they should be destroyed with those wicked men.

So the congregation "got up from the Tabernacle of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, on every side, and Dathan and Abiram came out," as if to dare Moses and Aaron, and God, by impudently standing alone, and waiting to see what could be done against them; "and stood in the door of their tents, and their wives, and their sons, and their little children."

Then Moses told the people that, if the chief rebels died a common death, God had not sent him; but, if the earth should suddenly swallow them up, then they would see that they had provoked God, or caused God to act as men do when provoked, and to punish his enemies; for God cannot be provoked as men are.

No sooner had Moses done speaking, than they were all swallowed up, and all that they had. "And all Israel, that were round about them, fled at the cry of them; for they said, Lest the earth swallow us up also."

You see that little children perished here. Perhaps they were old enough to take a part in mocking Moses and Aaron, and so you may learn that God punishes young sinners as well as old ones; for we are sure that what he did was just.

Not only did Korah, Dathan, and Abiram perish, but, also, "there came out a fire from the Lord, and consumed the two hundred and fifty men that offered incense;" they were, probably, struck dead by lightning.

Then "the Lord ordered Moses to tell Eleazar, the son of Aaron, to pick up the brass censers of the dead men, to throw





away the incense, as a token that he rejected their prayers, incense having been used to represent the sweet breath of prayer rising to heaven,—and to make of the censers a covering for the altar, by having them beaten out flat and thin. There was, indeed, then, a covering of brass on the altar, which, as it was made of wood, needed that to protect it from the heat of the fire that was continually burning on it; but these censers, beaten out and put again upon the brass, would make the altar still more secure from injury, and this covering would ever serve to remind the Levites how wicked it was for those to dare to become priests whom God had not appointed to be so, and what a dreadful end would be likely to befall them who would desire to burn incense, when he had not ordered them.

And now you will be astonished to learn, that after these things—and how long after do you think?—why only on the next day—“All the congregation of Israel murmured against Moses and against Aaron, saying, Ye have killed the people of the Lord.” They charged Moses and Aaron with killing the rebels, when God had done it before their eyes; and they called them the people of the Lord, when they had, by their wickedness, cut themselves off from him.

So the glory of the Lord immediately appeared in the cloud over the Tabernacle; for God heard all that this sinful people said,—“And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Get you up from among this congregation, that I may consume them as in a moment: and they fell upon their faces”—as you know they had done before,—to humble themselves, and to pray for the people.

It was very kind in Moses and Aaron to pray for people that behaved so badly to them, and so Christ teaches us to pray for our enemies, for all those who treat us with spite.

But the punishment had begun. The plague had seized them; and Moses, perhaps, having heard the people crying out in great distress, looked up, and saw them dying in all parts. So he hurried Aaron away for his censer with holy fire, which he was to take from the altar, and desired him to run in among the people, and burn incense, and make an atonement for their sins; “and he stood between the dead and the living, and the plague was





stayed." But so shocking an offence against God had caused the death of no fewer than fourteen thousand seven hundred, besides those that died the day before.

Now, let me tell you, my young friend, that, bad as the Israelites were, we are no better before God. Have we not often repeated our offences against him? Think, if you cannot find out many wrong things that you have done since you knew better. But Jesus Christ, our kind Saviour, stands between the living God and dead sinners. These sinners are not indeed dead in the body, but dead as to anything they do to serve God, and dead as being under sentence of death for their offences,—a death called eternal, because the blessing called "eternal life" is lost by it.—Well, through Christ pleading for us, and asking for forgiveness for us, we obtain mercy, and so are saved from the wrath to come.

THE SEVENTEENTH CHAPTER OF NUMBERS.

The Wonderful Budding of Aaron's Rod.

"And it came to pass that on the morrow Moses went into the tabernacle of witness; and, behold, the rod of Aaron for the house of Levi was budded, and brought forth buds, and bloomed blossoms, and yielded almonds."—Ver. 8.

You may, perhaps, have seen some persons of different sorts of authority, walking with long staves, peeled white, or painted, or gilt; something of the kind was in use among the princes or chiefs of the tribes of Israel; you know there were twelve tribes, and so among them there were twelve rods belonging to their twelve princes.

Well, God told Moses that he would now work a miracle; that is to say, he would do something so out of the usual order of things, that he would so strongly convince Israel that he had chosen Aaron for his priest, that they should rebel no more on that account.





AARON'S ROD THAT BUDDED.



KORAH, DATHAN, AND ABIRAM SWALLOWED UP



So he ordered Moses to get the twelve rods of the tribes, which were merely twelve dry sticks, and "to lay them up in the tabernacle of the congregation before the testimony," meaning the ark, in which the testimony or tables of the law were kept, and that man whose rod should blossom should be his priest.

Now, the rod of the tribe of Levi was marked with Aaron's name; and, after the rods had been laid up for a night, on the morrow Moses went into the Tabernacle, and "behold the rod of Aaron, for the house of Levi, was budded, and brought forth buds, and bloomed blossoms, and yielded almonds." This was wonderful—wonderful that a dry stick should bud, and still more wonderful that the same rod should bear buds, and blossoms, and fruit, at the same time!

Then Moses brought out all the rods which all the priests took, as they could easily know their own by having their names on them, and Aaron's wonderful rod was shown to the people. When they saw this rod, they were sadly frightened, and feared that they were all going to be punished with death, for having rebelled so against God, who now more plainly than ever gave honour to Aaron. God, however, did not punish them any further; but the rod was preserved in the ark for ages, still with its buds and blossoms, and fruit, and there it remained in remembrance of the rebellion of Israel, and of God's choosing Aaron.

THE EIGHTEENTH CHAPTER OF NUMBERS.

Provisions for the Priests and Levites.

"Every thing devoted in Israel shall be thine."—Ver. 14.

God having fixed Aaron in his office, and now showed to all the people that he would have him for his high priest, to atone for the people, he gave him very solemn orders to do his work and for the Levites to do theirs. And he told Aaron that he and





his sons should "bear the iniquity of the sanctuary," that is, the blame of neglect should fall upon them, if anything was done to defile it, and offend God there; so that they were obliged to look carefully after everything that was done by the Levites, as well as what they did themselves.

And then he provided comfortably for the priests from the different sacrifices; the parts not burnt with fire, and offered to the Lord, were to be theirs; and the best of the wine, and the oil, and the wheat; and the first ripe fruits of the land, such as figs, and apples, and plums, and pears, and pomegranates, and olives, and grapes. So were also the first-born of every animal, and even the first-born child was redeemed, or a sum of money given to the priest for him. Besides which they had thirteen cities to live in, with houses and lands, and gardens and fields. See the twenty-first chapter of Joshua. The priests had also many other like means of support.

But Aaron had no inheritance in the land of Canaan when it was afterwards divided among the tribes; he was to have only the portion just described.

The Levites also were provided for. They were to have one part out of ten of all that the ground brought forth—that is, if there were ten bushels on a man's ground, he was to give one bushel to the Levites, whether barley, wheat, or any other grain. While employed in the temple, they had provisions from its stores, and they were further allowed *thirty-five* cities to live in.

Thus God showed that he would have his ministers to keep to their work, and be faithful to their duty, and that he would have them comfortably taken care of while they served him. He also showed that he has a right to demand anything he pleases from us; for he gives us whatever we have, and that we ought not to be backward in giving out of what God gives to us to keep up religion in the world, and to promote his glory.





THE NINETEENTH CHAPTER OF NUMBERS.

The Red Heifer.

“And a man that is clean shall gather up the ashes of the heifer, and lay them up without the camp in a clean place, and it shall be kept for the congregation of the children of Israel for a water of separation : it is a purification for sin.”—Ver. 9.

My dear reader, there were a great many customs, under the law, to explain which would take up too much room in this work. But not a few of them were meant to show us, as in a glass, that we are sinners in the sight of God, and that, as sin is a defiling thing, we must not only be pardoned, but also purified. The law of the red heifer was of this kind. You may read the whole of it from the second to the tenth verse.

The heifer, you know, is a young cow. This animal was to be red, which being, a scarce colour, was the most precious. It was to have no spot, a sign of purity. It was to be slain without the camp, as though it were impure; for impure things were carried without the camp. The blood was to be sprinkled before the door of the Tabernacle, to have the virtue of a sacrifice, and, by being sprinkled *seven* times, it meant a *perfect* sacrifice; for seven times was the number of the days in which God made all things, and was always considered, on that account, as a sign of perfection. This heifer was, also, wholly burnt, and the ashes were to be laid up for the use of the congregation, as they might be needed, to mix with the water of purification, when any one who was defiled needed cleansing.

I must here repeat a passage I named to you before, which is in the Epistle of the Hebrews, and which, at once, shows you the meaning of all this ceremony; “For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit, offered himself, without





spot, to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God !”

Here, then, you see, that the “heifer” was meant to signify Jesus Christ ; the burning of the heifer showed the cruel death of Jesus Christ ; the unclean was meant to signify the sinner ; and the sprinkling of the unclean with the water, mixed with the ashes of the heifer, the applying of the benefits of Christ’s precious blood, to take away the defilement of the soul by sin.

From the eleventh to the last verse, you may see how great is the defilement of sin. He that touched a dead body, or went into the tent where there was one, was unclean, and must be kept separate from the people. This was to show that we defile ourselves if we mingle with those that are wicked, who are called “dead in trespasses and sins.” Whenever the Jews were defiled, and were *separated*, the ashes of the heifer, in water, called on that account “the water of separation,” were to be sprinkled upon them, and, if they were not, he, the defiled, was to be cut off from the people ; and as we daily sin, and so defile ourselves, we must daily look through our minds to the blood of Christ, to cleanse us from all sin.

THE TWENTIETH CHAPTER OF NUMBERS.

Moses smites a second Rock for Water.

“And Moses lifted up his hand, and with his rod he smote the rock twice ; and the water came out abundantly, and the congregation drank, and their beasts also.”—Ver. 11.

The waters out of the rock of Rephidim, of which you read in the seventeenth chapter of Exodus, had hitherto followed Israel in a stream through the wilderness. They were now stopped, perhaps to try if the new race of Israelites would show a better spirit than their fathers did under the like difficulty ; for their





fathers were nearly all dead, as God had threatened, and this was now the fortieth year of their travels about the wilderness.

However, just as their fathers murmured, so did these children of Israel; and they gathered themselves together against Moses and Aaron. And the people chode with Moses, or quarrelled with him, and spake, saying, "Would God that we had died when our brethren died before the Lord;" for they thought it a much easier death to die as those did who were probably killed by lightning, or those fourteen thousand seven hundred, who died by pestilence, than it was to die of fatigue and thirst.

They went on murmuring in more of the same sort of language, as you may read in the chapter.

Moses and Aaron humbled themselves before God, and prayed to him as they had often done at other times.

In answer to their prayer, the Lord again appeared in the cloud. And Moses was ordered to take his rod and to speak to the rock, which, as God commanded it by Moses, should obey its Creator, and give the people water.

So Moses called the people before the rock, and he said unto them, "Hear now, ye rebels; must we fetch you water out of this rock?"

Do not you see that Moses said what was very wrong here? He said, "Must we fetch you water out of this rock?" as though he and Aaron could do it without God's order. How foolish, and humbled, and disgraced he would have been, if God had let him smite the rock in vain! God did not, however, disappoint him; he gave the water as he had promised, but he said, "Because ye believed me not, to sanctify me," or set apart and show my honour, before "the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore ye shall not bring this congregation into the land which I have given them."

In this chapter we learn that Miriam, the sister of Moses and Aaron, died at Kadesh.

And Aaron being stripped of his garments, which were given to his son Eleazar, at the command of God, went up with Moses to the top of Mount Hor, where he died; for God said, "Aaron shall be gathered unto his people; for he shall not enter into the





land which I have given unto the children of Israel, because ye rebelled against my word at the water of Meribah."

"And, when all the congregation saw that Aaron was dead, they mourned for Aaron thirty days, even all the house of Israel."

There is one thing more to be noticed in this chapter:—Moses sent messengers from Kadesh unto the king of Edom, to ask him for leave to go through a little part of his kingdom, to prevent him from going a great way round to get into Canaan; and he told him that nothing should be touched, not even water without leave, or being paid for: but the king would not let him pass through, for which God afterwards remembered his unkindness; however, the Israelites turned away, and did not quarrel with the Edomites.

You remember that the Edomites sprung from Esau, and this is the reason why Moses began his message with saying, "Thy brother Israel!"

THE TWENTY-FIRST CHAPTER OF NUMBERS.

The first Battles of the Israelites and Canaanites.—The Brazen Serpent.

"And Moses made a serpent of brass, and put it upon a pole, and it came to pass, that if a serpent had bitten any man, when he beheld the serpent of brass, he lived."—Ver. 9.

This chapter tells us about some wars between the Israelites and the Canaanites.

King Arad, or the king of Arad, a Canaanite, having heard that Moses was marching near him, was afraid of so large an army, and so he gathered his armies and fought against Israel, and took some prisoners. But Israel prayed to God for help, and he heard their prayer, and they beat their enemies; and as they were idolaters, according to the designs of God that they should be cut off from the earth, the Israelites, as their appointed executioners,





wholly destroyed them and their cities : though, as we read of Arad in the book of Joshua, their final destruction did not happen till after this time.

Soon after this the Israelites asked leave of Sihon, king of the Amorites, to go through his country ; and they said, " We will not turn into the fields, or into the vineyards ; we will not drink of the waters of the well ; but we will go along by the king's highway, until we be past thy borders," or out of thy country.

" And Sihon would not suffer Israel to pass through his border : but Sihon gathered all his people together, and went out against Israel into the wilderness : and he came to Jahaz and fought against Israel." And Israel beat Sihon as they had Arad, and took possession of his land.

The Israelites then turned and went up by the way of Bashan ; " which was a nearer way to Canaan, a fine country, abounding with oxen and sheep, having rich pastures, and very famous for its oaks." Og the king was a giant, or a man who was very tall indeed, and very strong ; and he and all his people went out against Israel, " to the battle at Edrei," which was a famous city of Arabia.

And God encouraged Moses, and he likewise conquered king Og, and he took all his land.

We have besides in this chapter two remarkable songs. One was sung by the Israelites over a well. In the country where the Israelites travelled, travellers are often in great want of water ; for the earth for a very great number of miles is often covered with sand, very deep and very hot from the sun. When man and beast are weary and thirsty, nothing gives so much delight as the sight of water. The people of Israel again wanted water. God promised to give it, even before they needed it ; and so he kindly saved them from murmuring and provoking him about it, as they had done before. So Moses, at God's command, gathered the people together where the water was to be found, and the princes and nobles, by the direction of Moses, their lawgiver, dug up or moved the sand away with the end of their staves, and the water flowed out, and the place was called *Beer*, or, as that word signified in their language, *the well*.





The people then stood round the well, and, as we ought always to praise God for our comforts, they sang a song of praise, which you may read in the seventeenth and eighteenth verses, as you will now easily understand their meaning.

The other song in this chapter is one that was made by the heathen, in honour of Sihon king of the Amorites; and tells us, how he fought against Moab, and took from Moab a great deal of that country which Moses now took from him.

But the most remarkable thing in this chapter is the account of the *Brazen Serpent*. We find Israel murmuring as usual, about having neither bread nor water, and they seemed never to trust in God but just at the moment when they saw his miracles. This was very wicked; for he had promised to take care of them, and they ought to have believed his word; and he has promised that if we love him, he will also take care of us: let us then be afraid of being as wicked as they, and murmuring at our lot, when all things are not quite so pleasant as we would like to have them.

The Lord did not now kill the people by lightning, or pestilence, or the sword of their enemies; but he showed that he could do it by many ways, if they continued to rebel against him.

“And the Lord sent *fiery serpents* among the people, and they bit the people; and much people of Israel died:” that is, he sent serpents, whose bite was like fire, making a similar wound for pain with that which a burning coal would make. Serpents of this sort are still found in those parts; but God doubtless made a great many more than usual, to bite this murmuring congregation. And this was a punishment that taught them to see and remember that it was for their crime; for, as they had murmured about water, the burning bites of these animals caused the most cruel thirst, and, without very speedy help, all that were bitten of them must die, so you find great numbers did perish.

Then the people repented and prayed. “And the Lord said unto Moses, Make thee a fiery serpent, and set it upon a pole; and it shall come to pass that every one that is bitten, when he looketh upon it, shall live.”

This was an odd remedy; but it would try the sincerity of the repentance and faith of the people; it would show if they were





now ready to trust God by looking at it, and, if they were cured, they would know that God had sent the fiery serpents, and that the cure was not done by the serpent, but by him.

This serpent had, however, a very important meaning concealed under it, and was a sign of the salvation which a poor sinner obtains who looks in his mind, or by faith as it is called, to Jesus Christ, who is given to be the Saviour of sinners. The soul is bitten, as it were, by the serpent sin, and, if not cured, it must perish for ever: but Jesus Christ said, "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

THE TWENTY-SECOND CHAPTER OF NUMBERS.

Balaam and his Ass.

"And the Angel of the Lord said unto him, Wherefore hast thou smitten thine ass these three times? behold, I went out to withstand thee, because thy way is perverse before me.

"And the ass saw me, and turned from me these three times: unless she had turned from me, surely now also I had slain thee, and saved her alive."—Vers. 32, 33.

The Israelites now pitched their tents "in the plains of Moab." And as the Amorites had been conquered by them and King Og and his sons, and all his people slain, Balak the king of Moab was terribly frightened, and the Moabites thought that the Israelites would "lick" them all up, or destroy them as easily as the ox does the grass in the field.

So what did Balak do, but sent to Balaam, a famous conjuror, who lived at a place called Pethor. This man pretended to divine, or to know secret things, and it was thought, could, by cursing anybody, do him great harm. However, as he





did nothing without money, the king sent some to him by the elders or princes of Moab and of Midian.

If this man had cursed Israel, he could have done them no harm, but God was so tender of the honour of his people, that he would not allow him even to do this in appearance, and he made him hesitate in his mind what to do.

So Balaam begged the messengers to wait for a night and lodge with him; and then God said to Balaam, perhaps in a dream, "Thou shalt not curse the people, for they are blessed."

And in the morning, Balaam told the princes of Balak, that God would not let him go; and they went and told the king that Balaam refused to go with them to curse Israel.

Now, as Balaam did not tell the princes that he was not permitted by the Lord to curse Israel, but only that the Lord refused to let him go to Balak, and as the princes told Balak nothing about God's interference, but only that Balaam would not go, the king thought he would try Balaam again. Perhaps, had he known that Israel's renowned God had interfered, he would have been afraid to try any more.

And now he fancied that, perhaps, he had not paid respect enough to Balaam. So he sent some princes to him, higher in rank than the first, and they told Balaam that if he would curse Israel he should be promoted to great honour. Balaam, however, said, that if Balak would give him a house full of silver and gold, he could only do what God should bid him. So he begged them to stop for a night, as he did the former messengers, that he might again know what he should do.

Now Balaam was not a good man, but "loved the wages of unrighteousness," and would have been glad to have had Balak's offered honours and money; but you see how God has the hearts of all men in his hand, and Balaam could do nothing to hurt, or even cast seeming disgrace upon Israel, without God's permission.

When the morning was come, God told him to go with the messengers, and so he saddled his ass and rode off. In this country it is not usual for rich people to ride upon asses, but in those times and in the countries spoken of, there were beautiful asses, on which the most distinguished persons rode.





Nothing could be more plain, than that Balaam wished to go to Balak and to get his rewards, or he would not have delayed the messengers a second time, when he remembered what God had before told him ; and though God told him to go if the men called him, yet he went without being called, which proved that he was quite ready to find any way to get out of his restraint.

So "God's anger was kindled," because Balaam went ; "and the Angel of the Lord stood in the way for an adversary against him."

An angel is a spirit, and has not flesh and blood as we have. In those times the angels of the Lord often appeared for Israel, but God does not interfere for his people in the same way now, though his care is still shown towards them. Neither Balaam nor his two servants that were with him saw the angel. But we read, "And the ass saw the Angel of the Lord standing in the way, and his sword drawn in his hand ; and the ass turned aside out of the way, and went into the field ; and Balaam smote the ass, to turn her into the way. But the Angel of the Lord stood in a path of the vineyards, a wall being on this side, and a wall on that side," so that there was no going out into the field, as before, to avoid the Angel, with a stone wall on each side of the path. "And when the ass saw the Angel of the Lord, she thrust herself unto the wall, and crushed Balaam's foot against the wall : and he smote her again. And the Angel of the Lord went further, and stood in a narrow place, where was no way to turn, either to the right hand or to the left." And when the ass saw the Angel of the Lord, once more, "she fell down under Balaam, and Balaam's anger was kindled, and he smote the ass with a staff. And the Lord opened the mouth of the ass, and she said unto Balaam, What have I done unto thee, that thou hast smitten me these three times ? And Balaam said unto the ass, Because thou hast mocked me ; I would there were a sword in mine hand, for now would I kill thee. And the ass said unto Balaam, Am not I thine ass, upon which thou hast ridden ever since I was thine unto this day ? was I ever wont to do so unto thee ? And he said, Nay. Then the Lord opened the eyes of Balaam, and he saw the Angel of the Lord standing in the way, and his sword drawn in his





hand; and he bowed down his head, and fell flat on his face." And then the Angel said to him the words which you have read at the beginning of this history.

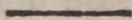
There are two wonderful things here, besides the appearance of the Angel: that the ass should see the Angel when Balaam could not, and that a creature made without the power to speak, should open his mouth and reprove Balaam. But the Lord who afterwards opened the eyes of Balaam, could as easily open the eyes of the ass; and as the ass did not speak of himself, which would, indeed, have puzzled us, but only as the Lord opened his mouth, we know that "with God all things are possible."

After the Angel had reproved Balaam, he was sorry that he had beaten the ass, and offered to go back again, if the Angel wished.

However, seeing that Balaam had evidently a great longing to go, he said he might, but he was to take care what he said. "So Balaam went with the princes of Balak."

As soon as Balak heard that Balaam was come, he went out to meet him, being both eager to see him and desirous of paying him honour; however, Balaam told him that he could say nothing but what God should permit.

And then Balak offered oxen and sheep in sacrifice to his idols, that he might be successful in cursing Israel; and on the day following he took Balaam into the high places of Baal, where altars were built to the idol so named, and where, from a great height, he might see all the people of Israel as they were encamped beneath, and so pronounce a curse against them.





THE TWENTY-THIRD AND TWENTY-FOURTH CHAPTERS OF NUMBERS.

Balak disappointed in cursing Israel.

- “And Balak said unto Balaam, Neither curse them at all, nor bless them at all.
- “But Balaam answered and said unto Balak, Told not I thee, saying, All that the Lord speaketh that I must do?”—Chap. xxiii. 25, 26.
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When Balak and Balaam got upon the high places, Balaam desired Balak to build him seven altars, and prepare him seven oxen and seven rams. And he told Balak to wait by his sacrifice while he went alone to another high place, to see if God would say anything more to him.

And there God met Balaam in some wonderful way, and Balaam boasted that he had now built his altars, and offered his sacrifices, not to idols, but to God himself. But “the sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord,” and he could still get no leave to curse Israel, for though he would have been glad to please Balak, yet God put a restraint upon his spirit and his mouth, and he was obliged to speak what God told him.

So he went back to Balak and took up his parable or speech, and he said, “How shall I curse whom God hath not cursed?” And then he foretold that the people should “dwell alone,” and the Jews have been a people separate from all other people to this day, though it was more than three thousand years ago when Balaam spoke the prophecy. And he said that their numbers should be very great, which came to pass; and he told of their happiness, and no people on the face of the earth had more reason to be happy, as long as they served God with all their heart.

Then Balak was very angry and said unto Balaam, “What hast thou done unto me? I took thee to curse mine enemies, and, behold, thou hast blessed them altogether.”

However, he thought he would try another place, where





Balaam would see only a small part of the people, and that perhaps he would then think less of them.

“And he brought him into the field of Zophim, to the top of Pisgah, and built seven altars, and offered,” as he had done before. Then Balaam retired again, to see if God would speak to him. And on his return, Balak asked him about what he had heard. And he said to Balak, “Behold, I have received commandment to bless; and he (God) hath blessed, and I cannot reverse it.” He told him God could not lie or change; that he saw no iniquity in his people Israel, meaning not any that he would punish by cursing them, for God often saw iniquity in them, and chastised them for it. He assured him that they were as strong as the unicorn, meaning not the horned horse, which you see with a lion, in the King’s coat of arms, and which is all a fancy, but a beast called the rhinoceros, which is wonderfully strong. He declared that no schemes of his could do Israel any harm, and that, as a courageous lion would eat of his prey, and drink the blood of the slain, so Israel should eat all their enemies.

Balak, still more vexed than before, then cried out, “Neither curse them at all, nor bless them at all.”

Yet he wished to try once more if Balaam could not get leave to curse Israel, and so he took him to the top of Peor, a high mountain in Moab, and sacrificed again as before.

But Balaam saw that all his enchantments were useless, and he waited on the spot to see what God would now do.

And the Spirit of God came upon him, and opened the eyes of his mind, and he prophesied about Israel. And he foretold their prosperity, by comparing them to well-watered gardens by the water side, and to a flourishing tree which grew tall with large leaves at the top, and that without a gardener’s aid, the providence of God alone making it grow; and also to cedar trees, which were famous for height and grandeur.

He said also, that Israel should pour water out of his buckets, by which he meant again, that the nation should flourish, as this was a way of watering the land to make its fruits grow; and he spoke of the chief of Israel becoming higher and greater than Agag the king of the Amalekites, who was then one of the great-





est kings in the world. And he further spoke as before, about their overcoming their enemies, like as a lion overcomes his prey.

Then Balak could no longer contain his anger, "and he smote his hands together;" and he "said unto Balaam, I called thee to curse mine enemies, and, behold, thou hast altogether blessed them these last three times." And he sent Balaam away. Balaam, however, stopped to go on with his prophecy, and he foretold the distant conquest of Moab and Edom, and the ruin of Amalek, and the wasting of the Kenites, and other great events that should take place, and did happen in after times, as God had told him.

Thus you see how God protected Israel from the malice and craft of their enemies, and would not suffer them to receive any harm.

THE TWENTY-FIFTH CHAPTER OF NUMBERS TO THE END OF THE BOOK.

Various Events a little before the Death of Moses.

"These are the commandments and the judgments which the Lord commanded, by the hand of Moses, unto the children of Israel, in the plains of Moab, by Jordan, near Jericho."—Chap. xxxvi. 13.

We shall now pass on to the end of Numbers, and merely glance, as we pass, at what the other chapters contain.

In the *twenty-fifth*, we find Israel drawn aside to commit idolatry with the Moabites.

And God ordered Moses to hang all the ringleaders, and the judges to slay all the rest of the offenders. And a plague broke out in the camp, and slew twenty-four thousand persons. These probably had some hand in the business, by consenting or counselling the other offenders, and so God visited them also.

Some think there is reason to believe that Balaam advised the Moabites to propose marriages with the Israelites, and as it was against the command of God that such marriages should take place, the Israelites that were guilty of breaking his command





ment, did very wickedly. And this was a wise command; for, supposing your parents were divided in opinion, and one worshipped God, and the other were stupid enough to worship that ugly thing worshipped by the Hindoos, of which a representation has been given in treating on the thirty-first chapter of Genesis,—perhaps you would be in danger of being taught to worship it too, and so you would be ruined by God's displeasure, as well as your parents. Besides, those that love God truly, can never agree to live all their days with those that show they hate him.

One Zimri, the son of a chief, had, as some think, married a Midianitish princess, who worshipped the false gods of Moab, and he had the audacity to take her to his tent in the presence of the people, who were weeping before God on account of the sins which their brethren had committed.

Phinehas the son of Eleazar the priest, and grandson of Aaron, seeing this audacious act of breaking God's law, instantly acted as magistrate on this occasion, and put God's commandment into execution, by putting the criminal and the princess to death. As this was not an act of private revenge, which would have been murder, but zeal for God's glory, and in obedience to his law, God was pleased with Phinehas, and promised to bless him for what he had done; and, on account of it, he stayed the plague.

As God had punished the Israelites, he visited also the Midianites, and commanded Moses to smite them, that they might not any more lead Israel astray into idolatry.

And God ordered Moses and Eleazar to number the people of Israel; and they found that they were "six hundred thousand, and a thousand seven hundred and thirty," that is, as we should say, six hundred and one thousand seven hundred and thirty, who were twenty years old and upwards, all fit for war, besides twenty-three thousand Levites for the service of the Temple.

"But among these, there was not a man of them whom Moses and Aaron the priest numbered, when they numbered the children of Israel in the wilderness of Sinai: for the Lord had said of them, They shall surely die in the wilderness. And there was not left a man of them, save Caleb the son of Jephunneh, and Joshua the son of Nun."





See how God fulfils his threatenings against sinners. You remember that all those that were numbered at Mount Sinai, the first year after Israel came out of Egypt, rebelled against God; and he declared that they should wander in the wilderness, but never enter Canaan, and so it came to pass. O then let us obey his commands, lest he swear in his wrath, that we shall never enter into his rest.

This numbering is related in the *twenty-sixth* chapter.

In the *twenty-seventh*, we have an account of the five daughters of Zelophehad, whose father having died in the wilderness, and left no son, were unprovided for in the promised land of Canaan, and they asked permission to take his share, that his name might not be blotted out, and forgotten; and in so doing they showed that they firmly believed in what God had said by his servants—that he would give Canaan to Israel. So God granted them their request; and ever after it was a law in Israel, that if a man died and had no son, then his daughter came in for the inheritance.

In this chapter we also learn that God told Moses to prepare for death. He was to go up to “Mount Ibarim and see the land,” which God had given to Israel, but he was never to enter it, for you remember that he offended God, by his anger and haughtiness, when he smote the rock at Meribah. It was, however, a favour to see the land, and though he was shut out of that, as he had been a faithful servant of God, he would not be shut out for ever from the presence and favour of God, which was a better portion than the earthly Canaan.

Moses, still concerned for Israel, now prayed God to appoint another captain, who should still lead them in safety; and God put his spirit in Joshua, and Moses at his command appointed him to be leader before all the people.

As the people were now a new generation, Moses was commanded to repeat to them all the laws about making offerings and feasts; and these are therefore given again, in the *twenty-eighth* and *twenty-ninth* chapters; and in the thirtieth chapter are laws to be observed in making vows or promises of anything to be given to God.

In the chapter following, Moses, at God's command, makes war





upon the Midianites, by sending out a thousand men of every tribe against them, that is to say, twelve thousand men: and Phinehas, the son of Eleazar the priest, went to the war with the holy instruments, and the trumpets to blow, in his hand.

And they slew all the men, and five kings of Midian, and Balaam the conjuror, who was there. And they took the women and children prisoners, and also all their cattle and goods.

And Moses, and Eleazar the priest, and all the princes of the congregation of Israel, went out to meet the conquerors on their return; but when Moses saw they had brought the women with them, "he was wroth with the officers of the host," for through the counsel of Balaam, the women had before caused Israel to sin, and drawn them aside to idolatry.

So Moses ordered every boy, and every woman to be put to death, but the female children, and the metals, with everything that passes through fire to be purified, were preserved.

This seemed very severe; but God commanded Moses, and "shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" The women, had they lived, would have made Israel to sin; and the boys, had they grown up to be men, would have avenged the deaths of their wicked fathers and mothers; and so God had them slain. O, if God so punished hardened sinners here, what will be their punishment in the world to come!

Then God commanded a tribute to be paid to him, out of the prey taken by the conquerors. And well might they make him an offering of thanksgiving; for on mustering the men, not one man was lacking, or had been lost, though a whole nation had been so completely beaten, and all their cities destroyed.

And the officers collected jewels and gold, to the amount of nearly eight thousand ounces; and Moses and Eleazar laid them up in the Tabernacle, as a memorial, "or remembrance, for the children of Israel before the Lord." So ought we always to bear in mind God's kindness towards us, and our merciful escapes from danger.

In the *thirty-second* chapter we have an account of the first settlement made by the Israelites, after their long journey through the wilderness. The tents of Israel were now pitched in the plains





of Moab, where they had been for some months. The land of Sihon, king of the Amorites, and of Og, king of Bashan, remained unoccupied, though conquered by Israel. These lands were fine pasture lands for cattle, and as the children of Reuben and Gad had a very great multitude of cattle, they asked leave of Moses to possess them, instead of having any share in Canaan, or the other side of Jordan.

Moses suspected that they were indolent and cowardly, and wanted to escape any danger in conquering Canaan, so he reproved them, and told them how God had punished their fathers for such a spirit. But they assured him that he had mistaken their intentions, for all they wanted was to leave their little ones, and their wives, and their flocks, and their cattle, and they were ready to go themselves and assist their brethren in getting their possessions.

So when Moses saw that their designs were fair, he gave them what they wished, on their promising to do as they had said.

"And Moses gave unto them, even to the children of Gad, and to the children of Reuben, and unto half the tribe of Manasseh the son of Joseph, the kingdom of Sihon, king of the Amorites, and the kingdom of Og, king of Bashan, the land with the cities thereof, in the coasts, even the cities of the country round about." And they built sheep-folds for their cattle, and they rebuilt the cities which were in a ruinous state from the wars; and in this way it happened that a part of Israel lived out of Canaan, on the other side of Jordan.

In the *thirty-third* chapter is a history of the removals and encampments of the children of Israel, from the time they left Egypt till they entered into Canaan, forty-two in all, and the chapter ends with a command from God to Moses, to tell the children of Israel to destroy all the idolatrous people of Canaan, and take possession of their land.

In the *thirty-fourth* chapter God marks out the limits of the promised land.

In the *thirty-fifth* the children are commanded not to forget to give a possession to the Levites, who were their ministers to perform religious service. These were to have forty-eight cities, six of which were to be cities of refuge, where any person who had





accidentally killed another might flee, to escape being slain, and to have a fair trial of his guilt or innocence.

For if any man killed another, the nearest relation of the person who was killed, pursued the murderer and put him to death. If, then, a man knew that upon trial he could prove that he had not wilfully killed the person whose life he had unfortunately happened to take away, he could hasten to the City of Refuge; but if he did not, and the avenger of blood overtook him, his blood was upon his own head, because he had neglected to save himself as God had appointed. The meaning of this I shall soon explain to you.

The *thirty-sixth* chapter settles something more about the daughters of Zelophehad, that they should marry only in the tribe of Manasseh, to which they belonged, so that their inheritance should not go from their father's family into any other tribe.

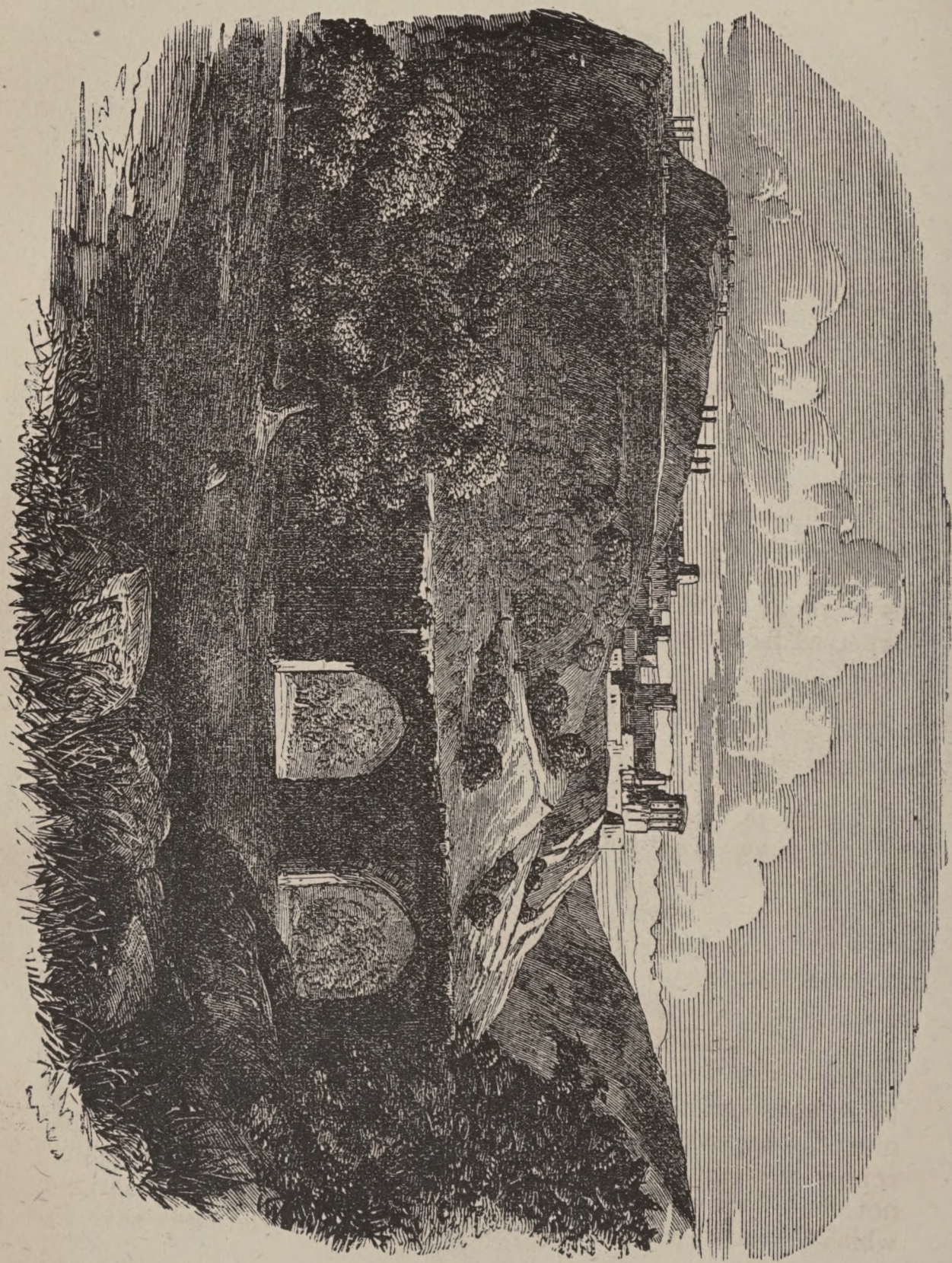
Thus ends the book of Numbers, containing some most interesting accounts of the perverseness of the Israelites, and the faithfulness and goodness of God towards that wonderful nation.





Monte Ebal and Gerizim.

SAMARIA AND MOUNT GERIZIM.





DEUTERONOMY,

WHICH MEANS

A REPEATING OF THE LAW.

IN this book Moses repeats the laws which God had before given ; for the old Israelites, to whom they were first spoken, were all dead in the wilderness, and as the young Israelites were now about to have Canaan, they were to be taught what God expected from them if they were allowed to possess it.

THE FIRST TO THE TWENTIETH CHAPTER OF DEUTERONOMY

*Laws for the Israelites, about Cities of Refuge—Holy Scriptures
—The cruel Idol Moloch—Conjurors—Landmarks.*

“On this side Jordan, in the land of Moab, began Moses to declare this law.”—Chap. i. 5.

IN the first chapters of this book Moses told the Israelites, what I dare say you will now remember, how that God had told them to go and possess the land of Canaan, and how they had murmured when the ten, out of the twelve spies, brought them a bad report of the land, and how that God said, “Surely there shall not one of these men of this evil generation see that good land, which I swear (or promised) to give unto your fathers ; save Ca-





leb the son of Jephunneh, he shall see it, and to him will I give the land that he hath trodden upon, and to his children, because he hath wholly followed the Lord." And how the Amorites chased them as bees, and destroyed them for being disobedient to God. And then he told them the story of the Edomites, and of Og, the king of Bashan; and of Sihon, the king of the Amorites; and about their first conquests, and their being given to the Reubenites, and the Gadites, and the half tribe of Manasseh. And also, how God had chosen Joshua to be their leader into Canaan. You can read all these things in the first three chapters of Deuteronomy; they are very interesting, and will refresh your memory; they may properly be called *An Abridgment of the Travels of the Israelites in the Wilderness*.

There is one thing which Moses mentions, and which is not before noticed. It is the bedstead of Og, the king of Bashan, from which it is guessed what a big man he must have been. You read of it in the third chapter. "For only Og, king of Bashan, remained of the remnant of the giants; behold, his bedstead was a bedstead of iron: is it not in Rabbath of the children of Ammon?" Rabbath was a city in which the kings of the Ammonites lived. "Nine cubits was the length thereof," that is, about four yards and a half long, or more than twice as long as one of our tallest soldiers; "and four cubits the breadth of it, after the cubit of a man," or the measurement of a cubit from a man's elbow to the end of his middle finger, which would make the bedstead about two yards broad, or about the length of a tall man. No wonder that Og wanted an iron bedstead, such a man's weight would have broken down some of our wooden ones. From the length of his bedstead it is supposed that he must have been eleven feet high, which is as tall again as a common-sized man. This was a frightful foe to meet in battle, for warriors did not then fight at a distance with powder and ball, as they do now, but only with spears, and bows and arrows: yet the Israelites, encouraged by their God, slew him, and though he had *sixty strong walled cities*, and perhaps many tall men in them, as the people seem to have been of large stature,—they easily took their cities too, for God was with them.





In the fourth chapter Moses strongly exhorts the people to serve God and keep from idolatry. And then we learn that he "severed three cities on this side Jordan, toward the sun-rising that the slayer might flee thither, which should kill his neighbour unawares, and hated him not in time past; and that fleeing unto one of these cities he might live. Namely, Bezer in the wilderness, in the plain country of the Reubenites; and Ramoth in Gilead, of the Gadites; and Golan in Bashan, of the Manassites."

The roads to these cities of refuge were always kept in good repair, that the man-slayer might get easily to them, if he had killed any one by accident; and there were posts, like our hand-posts at the corner of our roads, to show the way, that no one might lose a moment by being at a stand to know which road to take, and on these posts were the words, in large letters, REFUGE, REFUGE. The man that fled thither was tried, and if a murderer, he was executed; but if guilty of manslaughter, or killing a man by accident, he lived in the city till the High Priest died, when he was allowed to go home again.

But why was he to live there till the *High Priest* died? There, my young reader, is the grand meaning of this striking law. You have been told that a great deal that happened to the Israelites was to shadow or set forth as by a picture or resemblance, the future spiritual things in the gospel of Christ. Now the wrath of God is threatened against all sinners, who are in danger of ruin as the man-slayer, who could only be protected by running into the city of refuge. Christ is appointed for us to flee to him for salvation. To him then the trembling sinner must "flee from the wrath to come." The way is free and open, and if we "flee for REFUGE to lay hold on the hope" here set before us, we shall never perish but have everlasting life. This is the meaning of the city of refuge. May you learn, as a sinner against God, to make haste thither, and, by trusting the salvation of your soul to Jesus, be saved from ruin, when God shall judge and condemn the wicked world; and as the manslayer was free to go where he would at the death of the High Priest, so the sinner, because of the death of Christ, the great High Priest, is free from the curse of the law if he trusts in Him.





Moses goes on to repeat the Ten Commandments, and what happened at Sinai when God gave them. And he tells the people particularly to love and serve God that it may be well with them. And he does not forget the little children, for he says, "These words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes. And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates." (See the sixth chapter.)

These seem to us to be very odd commands, but they were very likely to make the people and their children remember all about what God did for Israel, in saving them from the Egyptians, taking care of them in the wilderness, when they served him, and bringing them to the land of Canaan.

You know it is a very good way to remember anything, to tie a knot at the end of a pocket-handkerchief or a thread round the finger, at least you will see people do so to try and remember anything they are afraid of forgetting; and so the Jews really tied sentences of the law to their wrists, and on their foreheads, and wrote them in different parts about their houses, that they might remember them; and all this was good: but Jesus blamed the Pharisees for doing so, because they cared not about the words they wrote, but thought that when they had done the thing, that was enough; which was a great mistake, for all this should have been done that they might really remember God's word.

All the Scripture given by God, up to that time, was written by scribes, or persons employed to make copies for people, and these laws would have been seen by few among so many, but for this way of writing the most striking parts, that all might often read them.

My dear young reader, how good is God to you! He sends you the whole Bible, and gives you good parents to teach you to read it, and plenty of copies are now printed, instead of written, and sold cheap, so that the poorest may have them. It was not





so, even in England, in former days, for when labourers were paid twopence a day, and the price of a sheep was a shilling, a Bible sold for seventeen pounds, that is to say, for the value of *three hundred and forty sheep*, and only for eight pounds less than the building of two arches of London Bridge *then* cost. This was six hundred years ago.

But only three hundred years ago, a New Testament cost two pounds sixteen shillings and eight pence; and that seems a great deal, but is indeed much more, when I tell you that that sum was then the same as if forty pounds had been given for it now.

And not above eighty years ago, Bibles were so scarce in Wales, that young people who loved them walked thirty miles to get one, and if they succeeded, went back full of joy.

In the following chapters, on to the *eighteenth*, most of the things are repeated which we have noticed in Leviticus. We shall stop a moment, however, just to make a remark or two on the following verses in the last-named chapter.

“There shall not be found among you any one that maketh his son or his daughter pass through the fire, or that useth divination, or an observer of times, or an enchanter, or a witch, or a charmer, or a consulter with familiar spirits, or a wizard, or a necromancer. For all that do these things are an abomination unto the Lord; and because of these abominations, the Lord thy God doth drive them (the Canaanites) out from before thee.”

The Heathen of Canaan worshipped a fancied god, which they called Moloch, and one part of their worship was to make two large fires, and their priests led little children between them, and so marked them as his servants, as some Christians mark their children as servants of Jesus Christ by baptism, while others leave this to be done by themselves when they grow up to be men and women. On some occasions the poor children were put into the fire and burnt to death to please their false god, as their parents supposed. O, young reader, love the religion of Jesus Christ, which will not suffer such cruelties to be practised on poor little





children ! You read of them in the *twelfth* chapter of this book , “ For every abomination to the Lord, which he hateth, have they done unto their gods ; for even their sons and their daughters they have burnt in the fire to their gods.” As there are parts in the world where they still burn women, and treat children with cruelty, and some where they kill men in sacrifice. O pray to God still to pity the heathen, and to bless those missionaries who go abroad to teach them the more merciful religion of Jesus Christ.

Charmers, which they had, were persons who pretended, by certain foolish methods, to cure diseases and many other evils. The blacks, in Africa, have bits of paper on which the priests write some words, and these the people wear about them, and think they will save them from being drowned or shot, and from other ills. Some, too, pretend to ask the devil about things which they want to find out. A wizard was a kind of conjuror, and a necromancer one who pretended to talk with the dead.

There are people in this country who profess all these things, which they call the black art, and the people were so silly, not many years ago, as to suppose that they really could talk with the devil and do people harm, and so they punished these pretenders with death ; and even if any poor old woman had a particular sort of face, and looked like what they thought a witch was, the people would fall upon her and burn her, or in some other way put her to death. We are now grown wiser, and the word of God teaches us that all this is pretence, so that such persons are not punished for doing the mischief, but for pretending to do it, and imposing upon people to get their money. Gipsies make a deal of money by pretending to tell fortunes, and many silly persons give them money to hear what they have to say. Now all these things are displeasing to God, who alone knows what can happen to us in a future time, and those who practice or encourage them do very wickedly.

There is another thing about which I must tell you, and which you will go back and read about in the nineteenth chapter “ Thou shalt not remove thy neighbour's land-mark, which they of old time have set in thine inheritance, which thou shalt inherit in the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee to possess it.”





See how particular God was that his people should be honest. The land-mark was then a great stone, which like our stones now, that mark the separation of counties and parishes, then served the purpose of a hedge, and separated lands from each other. If any one was inclined to be dishonest, he could easily remove the stone, and so by degrees get away a good deal of his neighbour's inheritance. This was breaking the law, which said, "Thou shalt not steal," and, "Thou shalt not covet," and God therefore commanded that it should never be done.

In the same chapter, God expresses his displeasure at any who should bear false witness, or tell lies against his neighbour, to do him harm, and whatever harm he intended to do him, he himself was to suffer, even if it was death. Where, however, the law demanded "an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth," if another had knocked one out, or given false witness, (see verse 21,) it was not usual to knock out the offender's eye or tooth, because this could not always be an equal punishment. If a man had but one eye, and that was knocked out, he became wholly blind, so that you see if the man who knocked it out, had one knocked out instead, it would have left him still another, and he would not have suffered like him whom he had injured. There was, therefore, a value in money fixed for these injuries, and the judges gave sentence according to the reckoned amount of the harm done. See how just God was in all his laws for Israel.

THE TWENTY-FIRST TO THE TWENTY-SEVENTH CHAPTER OF
DEUTERONOMY

The stubborn Son—False Weights—Doing Mischief to the Blind.

"For all that do such things, and all that do unrighteously, are an abomination unto the Lord thy God."—Chap. xxv. 16.

Now hear what God commanded of old, should be done to the rebellious son.





In the *twenty-first* chapter we read, "If a man have a stubborn and rebellious son, which will not obey the voice of his father or the voice of his mother, and that when they have chastened him will not hearken unto them :

"Then shall his father and his mother lay hold on him, and bring him unto the elders of his city, and unto the gate of his place :

"And they shall say unto the elders of his city, This our son is stubborn and rebellious, he will not obey our voice ; he is a glutton and a drunkard.

"And all the men of his city shall stone him with stones, that he die : so shalt thou put away evil from among you, and all Israel shall hear and fear."

See here how God would have children to honour their parents, even when they have grown up to be men and women.

All children that behaved proudly and insolently to their parents, and would not mind what they said to them, and slighted their reproofs, and disobeyed their commands, even after they had chastised them, were to be looked upon as criminals, and brought to punishment like the greatest rogues.

Here a case is supposed of one that, besides being stubborn and rebellious, was a glutton and a drunkard ; and not minding anything that his father or mother said, he was taken to the magistrates of the city where he lived, and punished by being stoned to death.

O, it must have been heart-breaking to good parents, to be obliged to take their rebellious son to the magistrates to be executed ! But this was God's law, and it was the son's fault if, in spite of all that could be said to him, he forgot his duty to his parents.

The Gospel of Jesus Christ requires no such severe law ; but, my dear young friend, if you have kind Christian parents who check you when you would do wicked things, and wish to keep you out of the way of sin and temptation, and you still will not obey, but as you grow up break through all restraint, and do as you please, and cast off your duty to your parents and your obedience to God, remember, that though you may not be put to a shameful death here, yet for all these things God will bring you into judg-





ment ; and your parents that now love you so tenderly, and pray for you, and wish to see you happy, must be separated from you for ever, in that state where you will be eternally miserable, and they eternally happy !

In the *twenty-fifth* chapter, God says, "Thou shalt not have in thy bag divers weights, a great and a small.

"But thou shalt have a perfect and just weight, a perfect and just measure shalt thou have ; that thy days may be lengthened in the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee."

They must not have a great weight and measure to buy by, and a small one to sell by, for that was to cheat both ways, when either was bad enough. See how displeasing it is to God to cheat our neighbour.

In the *twenty-seventh* chapter, we read, "Cursed be he that maketh the blind to wander out of the way."

Some young persons might think it amusing to pretend to direct or lead the blind, and then send him the wrong way. I hope that in this Christian land, where there is so much humanity, none may be found to do such a wicked thing, but that those who are taught to love God and their fellow-creatures, will never do what is so cruel and so displeasing to God.

In the *twenty-eighth* chapter there is a remarkable prophecy about the Jews, in which Moses foretells what happened to them many hundred years afterwards. If they should disobey God and forsake him, a foreign enemy should enter their land, which the Romans did at last, who were then a very fierce and powerful nation ; their country should be laid waste, and all the fruits of it eaten up by the army of foreigners ; their cities should be besieged, or surrounded by their foes to take them, and should fall into their hands ; and, among other miseries, the tender and deli-





cate woman even, should be so driven by hunger, that she should eat her own child, which really happened ; multitudes should perish, so that they should become few in number, and when the Romans besieged Jerusalem, there were two millions of Jews that perished by the sword, besides those that died of famine and disease ; and, lastly, the remnant, or Jews that remained, should be scattered into all nations ; and this too has come to pass, for now they do not make a nation living by themselves, as the French, the English, the Spanish, and others ; but though they are still numerous, they live apart, scattered among all people ; and there are some in America, and some in Germany, and some in France, and some in England, and some in many other countries ; a wonderful thing, which has not happened to any other nation in the world. See how true God is to his word, and what a dreadful thing it is to continue obstinately to sin against his commands.

All these things, and many others of a like kind, Moses wrote, and he ordered these laws to be read to all the people at one of their solemn feasts, once in every seven years. None were to be without hearing them ; for, said he, " Gather the people together, men, and women, and children, and the stranger that is within thy gates, that they may hear, and that they may learn, and fear the Lord your God, and observe to do all the words of this law. And that their children which have not known anything, may hear, and learn to fear the Lord your God, as long as you live in the land, whither you go over Jordan to possess it."

O, what happy young people are you whose parents teach you God's law, that you may know how to serve him, and may early learn to do that which is pleasing in his sight.





THE THIRTY-FIRST AND THIRTY-SECOND CHAPTERS OF DEUTERONOMY.

Moses warned of his Death—Moses's Song.

“And Moses spake in the ears of all the congregation of Israel the words of this song, until they were ended.”—Chap. xxxi. 30.

The Lord now told Moses that he must soon die, and he ordered him to write a song or history in verse, that might remind Israel of all that God had done for them, and warn them against the danger of forsaking him and turning to false gods; and this song would, by being often sung, be fixed in the people's memories, and hand down their wonderful history from father to son, and from generation to generation. This song is contained in the *thirty-second* chapter; a few parts you will, perhaps, want to be explained.

Moses begins by saying, “My doctrine shall drop as the rain: my speech shall distil as the dew.” What he means by this is, that what he should say, should be designed to do the people as much good as the rain and the dew to the barren earth when they descend upon it.

Then he says God is a rock: that is, God is strong as a rock is strong, and he is immovable, as a rock is immovable; that they are safe, indeed, that put their trust in him.

He says also, that with a tender care, like that of an eagle towards her young ones, God had guarded Israel; he made him ride on high or proud places of the earth, as a conqueror on his charger; “he made him to suck honey out of the rock, and oil out of the flinty rock,” meaning that in Canaan he had given him to enjoy that abundance of honey which there was there, and which the bees sometimes made in the rocks, in caves of which they formed their hives; and oil, also, which, when pressed, was put in vats hewn out of the hardest rocks, as it is now.

But he also sings, “Jeshurun,” a name he gives to Israel,—“Jeshurun waxed fat and kicked;” meaning that when Israel had





abundance, then the nations grew proud or insolent, like an over-fed beast, that would turn and kick the hand that had fed it.

I have explained what I have thought most needful in this song ; you may not, however, still quite understand some other parts in it, but I hope that what I have said will sufficiently show you its meaning.

And now, God ordered Moses to go up into Mount Abarim, the highest part of which was Mount Nebo, and here he might see the land of Canaan, but because he had trespassed against God at the waters of Meribah, in the wilderness of Zin, he was never to enter into it.

THE THIRTY-THIRD AND THIRTY-FOURTH CHAPTERS OF DEUTERONOMY.

Moses blesses Israel—Moses's Death—Joshua leader of Israel.

"So Moses, the servant of the Lord, died there, in the land of Moab, according to the word of the Lord."—Chap. xxxiv. 5.

Moses, inspired from heaven, now blesses Israel, and like Jacob foretels the future lot of the twelve tribes. It would keep us too long to explain all that is here said ; you will, however, read, that he said of the tribe of Joseph, "His horns are like the horns of unicorns." Now you are not to suppose that Joseph, or any of his tribe, had horns, but this is what we call a figure of speech, in which one thing is described by another. We sometimes say of a stupid child, he is wooden-headed, but we do not mean that his head is made of wood, but only that he is as stupid as if it were merely a block. Horns, in Scripture, when applied to people, mean power, and as the unicorn is a most powerful animal, Joseph's tribe are thus described as being very strong, so that they shall beat their enemies whenever they assail them. I have before told you, the unicorn is not the animal which painters draw like a horse, but a rhinoceros, which is a large beast found in Africa.

Again, you will read about Zebulun, that "They shall suck of





MOSES ON THE TOP OF PISGAH.

FP



MOAB, FROM THE PLAINS OF JERICHO.



the abundance of the seas ;” for that tribe were to have part of the sea-coast to live upon, and so to fish, and become merchants, by which they should live as infants live by drawing milk from their mothers’ breasts ; and Issachar should get support by treasures hid in the sand, perhaps by pearls and corals, which are found there by the sea-side.

Further, Dan is called “ a lion’s whelp ;” meaning that that tribe should be like a lion, springing suddenly and powerfully upon its enemies. Asher must dip “ his foot in oil ;” that is, the ground to be given to that tribe should be well planted with olives yielding oil, so that it should be so abundant, that they might be said to tread in it ; as we say sometimes of a rich man, that he rolls in riches, by which we do not mean that he lies down and turns himself over in his heaps of money, but that he has a very large quantity. Moreover, it is foretold of this tribe, “ Thy shoes shall be iron and brass ;” not that they should have shoes made of iron and brass, for who could wear them on all occasions ? but that they should tread upon ground, like our Cornwall, where mines of precious metal are in abundance under the feet.

So, further on, you read of God’s riding “ upon the heaven.” This is very grand, and is meant to show us, that God manages all the affairs of heaven, and that he directs even the clouds, and the tempests, and the winds, by his providence, with as much ease as a skilful rider manages a noble horse, or a skilful driver his chariot.

You will now, I hope, have a kind of key to unlock the meaning of some expressions of the above kind, which you could not before understand ; and when any expression of a similar nature happens to puzzle you, and appear absurd and contradictory, and impossible, only think that it must mean something of what I have just told you, and then the difficulty will be overcome.

And now we come to the death of Moses, which you shall have in the words in which it is described in the Bible : “ So Moses, the servant of the Lord, died there, in the land of Moab, according to the word of the Lord. And he buried him in a valley in the land of Moab, over against Beth-peor : but no man knoweth of his sepulchre unto this day.





"And Moses was an hundred and twenty years old when he died : his eye was not dim, nor his natural force abated.

"And the children of Israel wept for Moses in the plains of Moab, thirty days : so the days of weeping and mourning for Moses were ended.

"And there arose not a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face : in all the signs and the wonders which the Lord sent him to do in the land of Egypt, to Pharaoh, and to all his servants, and to all his land. And in all that mighty hand, and in all the great terror which Moses showed in the sight of all Israel."

Joshua now became the leader of Israel. "And Joshua, the son of Nun, was full of the spirit of wisdom ; for Moses had laid his hand upon him," to pray to God to give him his Spirit, "and the children of Israel hearkened unto him, and did as the Lord commanded Moses."



THE MOUNTAINS OF ABARIM.





THE BOOK OF JOSHUA,

OR

HISTORY OF THE WONDERFUL CONQUESTS OF JOSHUA.

THE FIRST, SECOND, THIRD, FOURTH, AND FIFTH CHAPTERS OF JOSHUA.

Joshua passes Jordan—Joshua meets an Angel.

“For the priests which bore the ark stood in the midst of Jordan, until every thing was finished that the Lord commanded Joshua to speak unto the people, according to all that Moses commanded Joshua, and the people hasted and passed over.”
—Chap. iv. 10.

Moses having died, God now commanded Joshua to take possession of the land which he promised that Israel should inherit; and he told him to be of good courage, and only to mind the holy law and obey it, and he should be sure to prosper.

Joshua then gave orders to the officers of the people, to provide victuals for marching; and he desired the Reubenites and Gadites, and the half tribe of Manasseh, who had already got their possessions, to join their brethren and assist in taking the land, which they honourably agreed to do, as they had before promised.

“And Joshua, the son of Nun, sent out of Shittim, two men to spy secretly, saying, Go view the land, even Jericho: and they went and came unto a harlot’s house, named Rahab, and lodged there.”





A harlot means a very wicked woman, and as persons who kept inns were not always the most moral, they all got this name. But it is reasonably thought, that Rahab was not so bad as the name means, but only an innkeeper, where these spies went to lodge : for it does not seem likely that good men would, if they could help it, go to lodge with so vile a person as a harlot means, and much less can we suppose that Salmon, a Jewish prince, would afterwards have married such an one ; but he did marry Rahab. (See Matt. i. 5.)

The king of Jericho soon learnt that Joshua's spies had visited his city, and finding out where they were, he sent to Rahab to deliver them up. However, instead of delivering them up, she hid them. And she said that the men had been there, but they were gone, and if they were pursued, they would soon be overtaken.

Now all this time she knew that the men were on the flat roof of her house, for so the roofs are made in that part of the world ; and she had covered them over with stalks of flax, which she had laid upon the roof to dry in the sun, in order to the beating of it, and making it ready for the wheel—a proof that she was an industrious woman.

We learn in the eleventh chapter of the Hebrews, that Rahab saved herself and her family by faith. She believed that God would destroy the wicked people among whom she lived, as he had already destroyed the two kings of the Amorites that were on the other side of Jordan, Sihon and Og ; and, therefore she would not be guilty of giving up his faithful servants to perish. If this had not been a case quite out of the common way, her conduct in preserving men who were going to destroy her country, would have been very wicked, and that of a traitor ; but God worked upon her heart, made her kind to the spies, and so prepared the way for Joshua to take Jericho, and to save her and her family.

But, as to the lie which she told, she was to blame, for no one is justified in telling a lie ; as it is a wicked thing, we are sure that God did not prompt her to that. This was the means which she thought of to save the men, but God could and would have saved them, without her doing anything so wrong. What can we say for her ? Why she had lived among heathens, and, as yet, knew





no better. When she afterwards came to live among the Israelites, she would learn that a lie was a very wicked thing.

Having got rid of the king's officers, Rahab went upon the house-top, and made a bargain with the spies, that as she had saved them, they would, in turn, save her and her family, consisting of her father and mother, and brothers and sisters. This was very affectionate on her part, and as she had shown the spies so much kindness, they readily agreed to show kindness to her.

As it would have been dangerous for the spies to have passed through the streets, she "let them down by a cord through the window: for her house was upon the town wall, and she dwelt upon the wall." And she told them to flee to the mountains that were near, and hide there for three days, and by that time the men who were in pursuit of them, would be tired, and give up the chase, and then they might safely go home.

The spies were, however, afraid, lest by any mistake, in the hurry of battle, Rahab and her relations should be killed; and, therefore, to make her safety more sure, they agreed that she should tie a line of scarlet thread in the window, by which thread they were let down, and that all her family should be brought together under her roof, and no one should dare to venture into the street, or, if he did, his blood should be upon his own head, that is, his death would be his own fault and not theirs. She was, also, faithfully to keep everything secret which had happened, or to lose their protection.

So the men hid in the mountains three days, when their pursuers returned; and they got safe back and told Joshua what had taken place, and what they had heard from Rahab that the people had heard of Israel's victories, and were afraid of them. "And they said unto Joshua, Truly the Lord hath delivered into our hands all the land; for even all the inhabitants of the country do faint because of us."

The next morning Joshua prepared to set off for Jericho. And he came to Jordan with all Israel, and after three days the officers went through the host, and desired them to follow the ark of the





covenant, which the Levites should carry before them. This ark was a sign of God's presence amongst them, and that he was their chief guide. They were to keep at the distance of two thousand cubits, or three thousand feet, a little more than half a mile, so that they might treat the ark with reverence, by not crowding upon it, and that they might see it better than they could if they were all thronging near it.

And now the people were to pass over Jordan, and as God was going to do wonderful things for them, Joshua commanded them to sanctify themselves for the occasion; meaning, that they should wash their persons and garments from all defilement, and that in token of the holy frames in which their minds should also be, when God was going to appear so strikingly in their behalf.

So the day following the priests and the Levites "took up the ark of the covenant and went before the people."

And God told Joshua that he would now honour him by a wonderful miracle, which should show Israel that he had chosen him to lead Israel, as he had before chosen Moses.

And Joshua told Israel what God would do for them, and that as soon as the priests who bore the ark should touch the brink of the river with their feet, the waters of Jordan should stand upon an heap on one side, so as not to flow down their channel; while those on the other side should continue running without any fresh supply; and so the bed, or bottom of the river, should be dry for Israel to pass over, as the Red Sea had before been for their fathers with Moses. Joshua also ordered twelve men to be selected, perhaps to go near and witness this miracle, for the entire satisfaction of the rest.

So the priests moved forward and stood in Jordan; and the waters dried up as Joshua had foretold, although this happened at the time of harvest, when the river overflowed its banks, from the great quantity of water; which made the miracle the more wonderful. "And all the Israelites passed over on dry ground, until all the people were passed clean over Jordan."

The number of the Israelites at this time was six hundred thousand men, besides women and children, which was, indeed, a vast army; yet it is wonderful that the Canaanites did not





watch them, and try to stop their crossing of Jordan. But perhaps they thought they could not pass the river where they did, and if they saw that the waters yielded to make way for them, it was quite enough to frighten them, alarmed as they already were, and to make them run away, wherever they could, for safety. But where can they be safe against whom God fights by his fierce judgments? O let us take care how we offend God, as the wicked people of Canaan did, by giving themselves up to all kinds of vice!

You know it is very usual for us to set up monuments in memory of great events. In Charlestown, Massachusetts, there is a monument to commemorate the battle of Bunker Hill; in Baltimore there are several in memory of great battles, and all over the country there are monuments to those who were killed in our wars, and to President Lincoln, who was murdered. The passing over Jordan was one of those great events which should be thus commemorated, and Joshua, therefore, commanded twelve men, one from each tribe, and, probably, the same men spoken of before, to take twelve stones from the spot where the priests' feet had stood, and to carry them to their first lodging-place over Jordan, where they were to leave them. And so, when at any future time their children should ask, "What mean you by these stones?" they should be told, "that the waters of Jordan were cut off before the ark of the covenant of the Lord, when it passed over Jordan, and that the stones were a memorial unto the children of Israel for ever."

Children may, at proper times, respectfully ask their parents questions about things they wish to know, and especially about the works of the Almighty.

Joshua also set up twelve other stones "in the midst of Jordan, in the place where the feet of the priests which bore the ark of the covenant stood;" and there they were when the Book of Joshua was written.

All the people having passed over, including the children of Reuben and Gad, and the half tribe of Manasseh, who passed over before the rest, being about forty thousand prepared for war, Joshua then ordered the priests to come out of Jordan, and its waters immediately flowed as before. So, "On that day the





Lord magnified Joshua in the sight of all Israel ;” and owned him as his servant appointed to lead Israel, “and they feared (or honoured) him, as they feared Moses, all the days of his life.”

And the people encamped in a place which they called Gilgal, in the east borders of Jericho, where the twelve stones brought out of the river were pitched, “That all the people of the earth might know the hand of the Lord, that it is mighty :” and so fear the Lord God of Israel for ever.

The drying up of Jordan must have been seen for some miles, and the news of the wonderful event, with the passage of the Israelites, soon spread among the Canaanites, and filled them with the greatest alarm, “neither was there spirit in them any more, because of the children of Israel.”

And God now commanded Joshua to mark the Israelites of the new generation with the sign of his covenant with them, and they kept a solemn passover, which they had been denied in their wanderings in the wilderness. The country people naturally fled away from the invading armies, and all their corn in the field and in store became the property of the Israelites, who took it and fed upon it, as part of their promised possession, given them by that God who caused it to grow ; and having no more need of manna, that miraculous supply of food ceased, and “they did eat of the fruit of the land of Canaan that year.”

The fifth chapter closes with an account of a wonderful appearance to Joshua. The person who appeared to him, while he was, perhaps, thoughtfully looking around Jericho, and contriving how to take it, was no common being, or he would not have worshipped him ; and from the command to take off his shoe, which was an act of reverence, it was that Angel who appeared in the burning bush to Moses. He now told Joshua that he had come as Captain of the Lord’s host, and Joshua might well be encouraged with the assurance that God would fight for him, and give him the promised land for his people.







THE FORDS OF THE JORDAN.



JOSHUA BEFORE JERICHO.



THE SIXTH CHAPTER OF JOSHUA.

The Taking of Jericho.

"And the Lord said unto Joshua, See, I have given unto thine hand Jericho, and the king thereof, and the mighty men of valour."—Ver. 2.

When the people of Jericho saw the armies of Israel coming, they shut up the strong gates of their city ; but though this would have preserved them from usual danger, yet now that God had given them up to Israel, nothing could save them.

But the city was to be taken in a very wonderful way, to show that, after all, the hand of God was in it.

Joshua had no orders to batter it, or scale its walls. The men of war were only to march round it once a day for six days ; and the ark was to be carried round, and seven priests were to march before it, blowing seven trumpets of rams'-horns. And on the seventh day they were to walk round the city seven times, and the priests were to blow with their trumpets : and at a long blast of the trumpets, the people were to make a loud shouting, when the wall of the city should fall down flat, and every man could get in without difficulty.

So the armed men went before the priests that blew the trumpets, and a number of people followed the ark, and they marched round the city daily, till the seventh day. Then Joshua gave the word, "Shout, for the Lord hath given you the city." And he commanded that everything should be destroyed in the city, except Rahab and her family, and the valuable metals that might be found, which were to be preserved for sacred uses.

And when the people shouted, down fell the wall, and then the Israelites marched in, "and they utterly destroyed all that was in the city, both man and woman, young and old, and ox, and sheep, and ass, with the edge of the sword." This was an awful execution, but God commanded it, and it teaches us to stand in awe of his judgments.





The city was also burnt with fire, but Rahab and her family were, by order of Joshua, saved by the spies, who took them without the camp, and she ever after lived with the Israelites. Joshua also pronounced a curse against him who should, at any future time, attempt to rebuild Jericho.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER OF JOSHUA.

The Sin of Achan.

“But the children of Israel committed a trespass in the accursed thing: for Achan, the son of Carmi, the son of Zabdi, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, took of the accursed thing: and the anger of the Lord was kindled against the children of Israel.”—Ver. 1.

Although the Israelites had been warned, at their peril not to touch any part of the spoils of Jericho, yet one was so overcome by his covetous spirit, that he ventured, in spite of God's command.

This sin was, however, soon found out; for Joshua sent men to view Ai, another city, about twelve miles from Jericho. And when they returned, they told him that the people were fled, and that the city would be easily taken; so that if he sent two or three thousand men against it, that would be quite enough.

So Joshua did so, but the men of Ai rushed out of the city, put them to flight, and killed thirty-six of their number. This frightened Israel, for they thought that after what happened to Jericho, the other people of Canaan would take their revenge, and their hearts lost all courage, and became as weak as water.

Then Joshua rent, or tore his clothes, as the Jews did when they were in great grief, and he and the elders of Israel put dust upon their heads, and fell with their faces before the ark of the Lord, to prove how much they felt humbled before God. And Joshua pleaded with God to save Israel.





Then God told Joshua, in some way, that Israel had sinned, and had taken what was accursed, and ought not to have been saved, and this was the reason why they could not stand before their enemies.

And God ordered Joshua to tell the people to sanctify, or wash themselves, to appear decently on the solemn occasion, and to take the tribes of Israel, and find out who had been the thief; and after casting lots it was discovered that Achan, of the tribe of Judah, was the man.

Then Achan confessed his sin, and he said, "When I saw among the spoils a goodly Babylonish garment," which some think was, most likely, the king of Jericho's royal robe, "and two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold of fifty shekels' weight, then I coveted them, and took them; and, behold, they are hid in the earth, in the midst of my tent, and the silver under it."

So Joshua sent messengers, and they ran unto the tent; and, behold, it was hid in the tent, and the silver under it. And they took them out of the midst of the tent, and brought them unto Joshua, and unto all the children of Israel, and laid them out before the Lord.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER OF JOSHUA.—CONCLUDED.

The Stoning of Achan.

"And Joshua, and all Israel with him, took Achan, the son of Zerah, and the silver, and the garment, and the wedge of gold, and his sons, and his daughters, and his oxen, and his asses, and his sheep, and his tent, and all that he had: and they brought them unto the valley of Achor.

"And Joshua said, Why hast thou troubled us? the Lord shall trouble thee this day. And all Israel stoned him with stones, and burned them with fire, after they had stoned them with stones."—Vers. 24, 25.





It may appear strange that God should make all Israel suffer for the sin of one, and that thirty-six men should be killed at Ai, because Achan had broken God's command. But as Israel were a people prone to sin, this fear came upon them for a future warning; and as for the thirty-six that fell, we are sure that God would do right respecting them. Perhaps they had designed to have done as Achan did, but could not find the opportunity; God, however, knew their hearts.

Then, again, it appears strange that all Achan's family should perish with him; but it is most likely that they all delighted in the prize which they thought he had got, and helped him to conceal the articles; in which case, knowing it was against God's command, they were as wicked as he.

Why God had the cattle destroyed we cannot so easily explain; but, perhaps, it might be to prevent any of them from being afterwards used for any sacred purpose in sacrifice, or for the service of the Tabernacle, as they had belonged to so wicked a man, and God would have nothing used for his honour that was defiled. At this time such distinctions are useless, but then God spoke to men by them, and taught them most holy and solemn lessons.

Some think that though Achan was punished, and God's law satisfied in his death, yet that God's mercy was granted to him in another world. But as nothing is said about this, we must be silent, and remember, from this example, how shocking a thing it is to displease God. We have, indeed, often done things with which he must have been displeased; let us study, however, never wilfully to offend him, and let us seek his pardon for all our offences, through Jesus Christ, on account of whom he is still ready to forgive us.





THE EIGHTH CHAPTER OF JOSHUA.

The Taking of Ai.

“And Joshua burnt Ai, and made it an heap for ever, even a desolation unto this day.”—Ver. 28.

God now encouraged Joshua to go and take Ai, the inhabitants of which were to perish, like those of Jericho, but it was his pleasure that the goods and cattle should not be destroyed.

So Joshua took all the people of war with him, and chose out thirty thousand brave men, who marched by night to lie in wait, cunningly hid behind the city.

And in the morning he himself went up with a body of men, and appeared before the city; and he set another body of men, to the number of five thousand, to lie in ambush, or concealed, near where the first body was hidden.

And Joshua retired into a neighbouring valley. And when the king of Ai saw the number of his men which he exposed, and was not aware that any were hidden, he marched boldly out to attack them. Joshua and those that were with him then ran away, as the troops did that were beaten because of the sin of Achan; and, the king of Ai supposing that they did so in earnest, pursued them, and all the men of Ai joined the army, and thought that now they should ruin Israel for ever.

Joshua having drawn them all out of the city, made a sign with his spear, which was known to those that were concealed, and as the gates of the city were left open, they rushed in and set some of it on fire.

The men of Ai happening to look behind, saw the smoke, and they were so frightened that they knew not which way to run. Then Joshua turned upon them; and those in the city ran out and attacked them on the other side, and they “let none of them remain or escape.” So that day there fell full twelve thousand, even all the men and women of Ai.





And Joshua finished the burning of Ai after taking the cattle and the spoil, and the king of Ai he hanged on a tree, till the evening, when the body was taken down, according to the custom of the Jews, and was thrown on the ground at the entrance to the city, and a great heap of stones raised over it in memory of the event.

"Then Joshua built an altar unto the God of Israel, in Mount Ebal," and there the people offered burnt-offerings, and peace-offerings unto the Lord, in thankfulness to him for the good land into which he had brought them. And he wrote upon the stones of the altar, a copy of the blessings and curses of the law of Moses, and he read all the words of the law to all Israel, "with the women and the little ones, and the strangers that were conversant among them," so that you see, even little children were to attend to the law of God, or they would suffer his displeasure if they broke it.

THE NINTH CHAPTER OF JOSHUA.

The Gibeonites saved by Craft.

- "And when the inhabitants of Gideon had heard what Joshua had done unto Jericho and to Ai,
"They did work wilily, and went and made as if they had been ambassadors; and took old sacks upon their asses, and wine bottles, old, and rent, and bound up.
"And old shoes, and clouted, upon their feet, and old garments upon them; and all the bread of their provision was dry and mouldy.
"And they went to Joshua unto the camp at Gilgal, and said unto him, and to the men of Israel, We be come from a far country: now, therefore, make ye a league with us."—Vers. 3—6.

Alarmed at the success of Joshua against Jericho and Ai, all the kings of Canaan now joined together to fight him.

But the inhabitants of Gibeon, which was supposed to have been the capital of the *Hittites*, thought it better to try and make





friends with a people that they might vainly hope to withstand. But what were they to do? They, no doubt, understood that the Israelites gave no quarter to the Canaanites, so they resolved to go to them as strangers from a very far country. Some think it would have been better if they had honestly thrown themselves on their mercy, than have practised deceit. However, of this we know nothing. They tried a trick, and it, in part, succeeded. They lived only about twenty-four miles off from where the tents of the Israelites were pitched, and must soon have fallen a prey to their sword. So they dressed up men like ambassadors from a far country, and they took with them old sacks, to make the Israelites believe that they had carried a deal of provision with them for a long journey; and wine-bottles, which were made of goat-skins, and not of glass as ours are, and these were "old, and rent, and bound up," as if they had tried every method to make them hold their liquor to the last; and old shoes or sandals for the soles of the feet, which they had patched, to make it appear that they had walked very far in them by the side of their asses; and old garments worn as by long travelling; and lastly, mouldy bread.

And as soon as they arrived at the camp of Israel, they saw Joshua, and they told him they had come a great way, and wanted him to make a league with them, that is, an agreement to be friends. The men of Israel seemed rather to suspect them, and hinted that they probably dwelt near, and then how could they make a league with them, for they knew that God had said (Deut. vii. 2), "Thou shalt make no covenant with them, nor shew mercy unto them."

Being challenged as Canaanites, they made no answer, but turned to Joshua, whom they found out to be the chief, and they said, "We are thy servants."

Joshua then asked, "Who are ye? and whence come ye?" And they told Joshua that they had heard of all the fame of the God of Israel, and what he had done in Egypt, and to the kings Sihon and Og, cunningly saying nothing about Jericho and Ai, as if they knew nothing about Canaan. And they added, that their people being desirous of uniting with them, had ordered them to undertake the long journey to get their consent. And then they showed





Joshua the old rubbish they had got with them, and, to deceive him, they said, "This, our bread, we took hot from our provision, out of our houses, on the day we came forth to go unto you; but now, behold, it is dry, and it is mouldy, and these bottles of wine which we filled, were new; and, behold, they be rent; and these, our garments and our shoes, are become old, by reason of the very long journey."

So the Israelites then "took of their victuals," which was an act of friendship, and it is so considered among the people of Asia to this day, and those who eat even salt together, feel themselves bound by a perpetual covenant or engagement, to be faithful to each other. In doing this they placed themselves in a great difficulty; for, Joshua having made peace with the Gibeonites, and the princes of the congregation having taken their oath that they should live—if they had put them to death, they would have broken their oath, and this would have been very wicked; and yet, in sparing them, they had spared a people whom God had appointed to destruction, and Israel were to be his executioners. However, there was this excuse for them, that they did not spare them as Canaanites, as they thought that they were of another country.

In three days only, the Israelites found out that the Gibeonites had cheated them, and that they lived close by them. Liars will, sooner or later, be detected. But as the Israelites had promised to spare their lives, the princes or chiefs did so, and when they came to the four cities which belonged to their people, "they smote them not, because the princes of the congregation had sworn unto them by the Lord God of Israel."

The congregation murmured at this, for they were not all engaged in the matter, and it is feared that some of them were displeased that they could not get the plunder. However, the chiefs quieted the people, and punished the Gibeonites by making slaves of them all the days of their lives. They were obliged to be hewers of wood and drawers of water, which was reckoned a very degrading employment. So they hewed wood and drew water for the use of the people, and particularly for the service of the Tabernacle.





THE TENTH CHAPTER OF JOSHUA.

The five Kings defeated and executed—The Sun and Moon stand still for Joshua.

“Therefore the five kings of the Amorites, the king of Jerusalem, the king of Hebron, the king of Jarmuth, the king of Lachish, the king of Eglon, gathered themselves together and went up, they and all their hosts, and encamped before Gibeon, and made war against it.”—Ver 5.

After the people of Gibeon had united with Israel, Adonizedek, who was the king of Jerusalem, “sent to Hoham, king of Hebron, and unto Piram, king of Jarmuth, and unto Japhia, king of Lachish, and unto Debir, king of Eglon, saying, Come up unto me and help me, that we may smite Gibeon; for it hath made peace with Joshua, and with the children of Israel.

So the kings united with Adonizedek, and marched against Gibeon. And when the people saw so great an army against them, they were again in a fright, and they sent off to Joshua with all speed, saying, “Come up to us quickly, and save us, and help us.”

Now, as Joshua had given his word, he would not kill the Gibeonites; and he would not, if he could help it, let others kill them. So he marched all night to Gibeon, with all his army, and God told him to fear nothing. And he fell upon the five kings, and they being surprised, fled on every side, and Joshua pursued them. And God made it hail, and the storm fell upon them, and the stones were so large and came down with such a force, that “they were more which died with hail-stones, than they whom the children of Israel slew with the sword.”

The battle, probably, began very early in the morning, and Joshua chased the five kings till the evening. And, now the sun and moon were both in sight: the sun was setting, and the moon rising. But Joshua had not destroyed all his enemies, and he





spoke to the Lord before Israel, that the sun might stand still upon Gibeon, and the moon in the valley of Ajalon, over which they both seemed to shine, and so, by the day and the light holding out longer, he might completely defeat his foes. "And the sun stood still, and the moon stayed, until the people had avenged themselves upon their enemies."

Thus was Joshua highly honoured before all the people; and God showed to the heathen how foolish they were to worship the sun and moon, which they did, when He who made them could do as he pleased with them against themselves, and was alone worthy to be adored.

The five kings being entirely beaten, went to hide themselves in a cave, where the Israelites found them out, and they told Joshua, saying, "The five kings are found hid in a cave at Makedah." And Joshua said, "Roll great stones upon the mouth of the cave," so as to make them prisoners, "and set men by it for to keep them. And stay you not, but pursue after your enemies, and smite the hindmost of them; suffer them not to enter into their cities, for the Lord your God hath delivered them into your hand. And it came to pass when Joshua and the children of Israel had made an end of slaying them with a very great slaughter till they were consumed," so that none but stragglers were left here and there, and no army remained, "that the rest which remained of them entered into fenced cities."

The people now returned to the camp, and Joshua ordered the kings to be brought out of the cave. And he desired his captains to come and put their feet upon the necks of the kings, which was an encouragement to them to show them that these were but the beginnings of victory, and that so they should trample under feet all the wicked idolaters of Canaan, till they had got the whole land for a possession as God had promised.

And then Joshua smote them and slew them, "and hanged them on five trees;" and in the evening they were taken down and put into the cave in which they had hid, and great stones were put before the cave, and there the bodies remained when the Book of Joshua was written.

The same day in which the five kings were hung, Joshua took





Makkedah, a royal city, and he slew its king and all its people. Then he took Libnah and its king, and served them in the same manner. And then he went to Lachish, and that he destroyed, but the king had already been hung with the five kings. And thence he went to Eglon, and did exactly the same there, the king having already been executed. And from Eglon he went to Hebron, which, it seems, had chosen another king in the room of the one that was hung, and he "took it and smote it with the edge of the sword, and the king thereof, and all the cities thereof;" for Eglon was like London, the chief city, but there were other smaller ones belonging to it. On his way back he also took Debir and its king.

"So Joshua smote all the country of the hills, and of the south, and of the vale, and of the springs, and all their kings: he left none remaining, but utterly destroyed all that breathed, as the Lord God of Israel commanded." "All these kings and their land did Joshua take at one time, because the Lord God of Israel fought for Israel."

I think, my dear young reader, that you must almost have been frightened yourself to read of such dreadful havoc among the people of Canaan. It was, indeed, shocking that so many should have been so cut off with the sword; and Joshua would have been a very wicked man had he done all this of his own accord. But you have already read how God destroyed all the old world with a flood, except Noah and his family, and how he caused fire to descend from heaven, and to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah, and the other wicked cities that perished with them. Now, it pleased God, instead of bringing a flood, or sending fire upon these Canaanites, to order Joshua to destroy them with the sword, and he, therefore, acted as God's executioner.

God is a merciful God, therefore the crimes of these people must have been very great indeed, that he should order them all to be destroyed in so dreadful a way. They were a wicked race of idolaters, and lest they should spread all over the world, God ordered them to be swept away.

The poor children also perished. See how great an evil it is to have wicked parents, and bless God, if yours love God, and so





are loved of him, and are training you up that you may be happy with themselves in God's favour. Some of these children were, however, too little to know good from evil, and though they died, we may believe that a merciful God showed them mercy for the sake of Jesus Christ, who should die for sinners, and that in heaven they now praise God that they did not live to be men and women, and so, among wicked heathen, to have become heathen themselves.

THE ELEVENTH AND TWELFTH CHAPTERS OF JOSHUA.

Further Conquests of Joshua.

“So Joshua took the whole land, according to all that the Lord said unto Moses, and Joshua gave it for an inheritance unto Israel, according to their divisions by their tribes. And the land rested from war.”—Chap. xi. 23.

There were yet more kings in Canaan, and they would not let Joshua alone, but Jabin, king of Hazor, got a number of other kings to join him, “and they went out, they and all their hosts with them, much people, even as the sand that is upon the sea-shore in multitudes, with horses and chariots very many.” And these kings all marched to fight against Israel.

Josephus, a Jewish writer, says “that the Canaanitish army consisted of three hundred thousand foot, ten thousand horse, and twenty thousand chariots;” and this he might know from some books of the wars which had been kept among the Jews. The chariots were very terrible things, for they had iron scythes sticking out on each side to cut down men, as they rolled along.

God told Joshua not to fear this army, for he also should soon destroy it as he had the others. And Joshua smote them, and houghed their horses, or lamed them, that they could not rush on his men, and he burnt all their chariots with fire.

“And all the cities of these kings, and all the kings of them





did Joshua take, and smote them with the edge of the sword, and he utterly destroyed them, as Moses, the servant of the Lord, commanded."

Some cities of Canaan that were very strong, were, however, preserved for the Israelites to dwell in; and the Israelites also preserved their cattle and their wealth for their own use, but destroyed all the people, as God commanded.

• It is said that the Lord hardened the hearts of these Canaanites, that they should come against Israel in battle; which means that he left them to their own hardness of heart, so that they did not try, like the Gibeonites, to get their lives spared by submission.

It is said, too, that "Joshua made war a long time with all those kings;" for though the Bible gives a very short account of Joshua's conquests, yet they were not all accomplished in a day, a week, a month, or a year. Some of the Jewish writers say, they took seven years to complete them.

The last thing that Joshua did was to attack the Anakims, a race of giants, or strong men, that lived in the mountains about Canaan, and them also he destroyed entirely, excepting some that lived in the cities of Gaza, Gath, and Ashdod.

Altogether, thirty-one kings were conquered. Canaan, indeed, was a small territory; but then kings, instead of having millions of subjects, as they now have, had only a few thousands. So, formerly in England, there were many kings, who reigned only over a county or two each, while now one sovereign reigns over all the counties, and Scotland and Ireland besides.

Canaan must, however, have been, indeed, a good land, and full of corn, and herbs, and fruit, to feed so many; but the people never honoured nor served the God who had given it to them, so he took it at last entirely away, "and gave their land for an heritage, even an heritage unto Israel his servant, for his mercy endureth for ever."





THE THIRTEENTH, FOURTEENTH, FIFTEENTH, SIXTEENTH, SEVENTEENTH, EIGHTEENTH, AND NINETEENTH CHAPTERS OF JOSHUA.

The Land divided by Joshua among the Tribes.

"These are the inheritances which Eleazar, the priest, and Joshua, the son of Nun, and the heads of the fathers of the tribes of the children of Israel, divided for an inheritance by lot, in Shiloh, before the Lord, at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation; so they made an end of dividing the country."—Chap. xix. 51.

The whole land was not yet conquered; for God said to Joshua, "Thou art old and stricken," or grown, "in years, and there remaineth yet very much land to be possessed."

In the *thirteenth* chapter we read the account of the land that was yet to be given to Israel, consisting of all the borders of the Philistines and others.

Now, as Joshua was old, he was not required to fight any more, but to leave others to do this, and he was only to divide the lots or portions among the people of Israel, and so there could be no quarrelling amongst themselves after his death, about what parts they should have.

Among the portions, he was to give land that was not yet conquered; but what God promises he always performs, and the children of Israel were to take his word, as though the thing were done, and to receive for lots some countries which should be conquered by them, when their tribes might be so large as to need them.

Caleb was one of the twelve spies, and he contradicted the timid spies that would have made the people afraid of taking Canaan.

In the *fourteenth* chapter we find him asking Joshua for a particular portion which Moses had granted to him for his pious confidence in God. For Moses had said, "Surely the land whereon thy feet have trodden, shall be thine inheritance and thy chil-





dren's for ever, because thou hast wholly followed the Lord my God." Caleb, with gratitude, said—that God had preserved him to enjoy that lot, and though he had come to be eighty-five years old, yet he was still ready to fight in his righteous cause, and God had made him strong enough to drive out the enemy, though the land he desired was inhabited by some of the most mighty.

And Joshua blessed him for his faith in God, and gave him Hebron, as he desired, for an inheritance.

And afterwards we read that Caleb conquered Hebron, and "drove thence the three sons of Anak."

Then he had to take Debir or Kirjath-sepher. And he offered a reward to the captain who should take it, which reward was the gift of his daughter as a wife. In Eastern countries this is regarded as the highest honor that can be conferred, to be allowed to marry a princess, such as Caleb's daughter was, as a reward for some act of valor. Caleb was the chief prince of the tribe of Judah, and it was a great privilege to be allied to him. Here the wishes of the woman herself are consulted, but there they are not. Well, "Othniel, the son of Kenaz, the brother of Caleb," took the city, and so he married Achsah, Caleb's daughter, who was his first-cousin, and to whom, it is supposed, he wished before to be united, and therefore he bravely went and took the city out of regard for her. This Othniel was, some years after, made a judge or governor of Israel.

There is a story about Achsah, that when her father took her home to Othniel, she got his leave to ask a field of her father, which she much desired, for he had given her some land that looked towards the south, and was very dry; so he gave her some land on high and low ground, with "upper springs and nether," or lower springs; which was, of course, well watered, having these springs in it, and this was very desirable in so hot a country, especially for watering cattle. This seems an odd little story to slip in here; but it was of some importance, for there is nothing useless in the Bible; and the reason why this was mentioned was, perhaps, to take care and let it be known to the Israelites in future, how this bit of land came into the hands of Othniel, who would otherwise have had no right in it for Caleb had





some sons to inherit his property. (See 1 Chron. iv. 15.) We should always see, in the smallest thing, that we have a just right to what we possess.

And now we may hasten through this and the following chapters, without meeting with anything remarkable, though all they contain was of great importance for securing to every tribe a full right to its possession.

The *fifteenth* chapter marks out very carefully the lot of the tribe of Judah,—all the cities, and towns, and villages, and countries, granted to the people of that tribe; but it is said they could not drive the Jebusites out of Jerusalem, who continued there when the Book of Joshua was completed.

It is to be feared that this tribe were sluggish, and did not put that trust in God which they ought to have done, or they would have had more land in their possession. The fault was not in God's promise, which he would have kept, but in their not trying to get the land, which it was their duty to have done.

It was in the country of this tribe that Jesus was afterwards born; that is, in Bethlehem of Judea.

The *sixteenth* and *seventeenth* chapters mark out the lot of the tribes of the children of Joseph—Manasseh and Ephraim. The Ephraimites, like the children of Judah, seem also to have become soon too idle, for they did not drive the Canaanites out of Gezer, though God had commanded them “utterly to drive out the Canaanites,” and to make no peace with them.

In the lot of the tribe of Ephraim was Rama, the city of Samuel, called in the New Testament Arimathea, where Joseph belonged, who took care of the burial of Jesus. Shiloh also was here, where the Tabernacle was first set up. A palm-tree, under which you will by and by read that Deborah judged or governed Israel, was in the land of this tribe. Samaria, a famous city, was also here, and Jacob's well, where Christ talked with the woman of Samaria.

In the lot of Manasseh, the daughters of Zelophehad had a share, of which you have before read, “And they came near before Eleazar, the priest, and before Joshua, the son of Nun, and before the princes, saying, The Lord commanded Moses to give us an inheritance among our brethren; therefore, according to the





commandment of the Lord, he gave them an inheritance among the brethren of their father."

The tribe of Manasseh were faulty like the other tribes we have named, for they did not drive all the Canaanites out of their lot, but only made them tributary, or, in other words, obliged them to pay some money, or do some works for them every year, for which they were to live free from all attacks.

To this tribe Gideon belonged, of whose exploits we shall soon read.

The children of Joseph, Manasseh, and Ephraim, murmured at their lot; for, although they were powerful, they did not like the Canaanites who lived in the land of the valley, or flat land, which they had to conquer, for they had war-chariots of iron, which were very terrible.

As you have several times read of these frightful war-chariots of iron, here is a picture of one anciently used by the Greeks,





and of the same kind. You see it has scythes fastened to the wheels and to other parts, and spears in front, so that besides the men it carried, who used bows and arrows, and spears, it was a dreadfully destructive weapon; when the horses, all cased with iron, or brass, or other metal dresses, rushed in among the ranks of an enemy, which the scythes would mow down like grass. These weapons are not now used, for the horses would not rush in amongst guns, but would be likely to turn back upon their own masters.

Joshua, however, told the children of Joseph not to fear, for, said he, "thou shalt drive out the Canaanites, though they have iron chariots, and though they be strong."

In the eighteenth chapter we find the Tabernacle, which had been often pitched and removed with the camp of Israel, fixed in Shiloh, a city in the lot of Ephraim, and lying in the centre of the country now belonging to Israel, that Israel might meet there to worship God. And at Shiloh it remained for three hundred and twenty-five years, till the sin of the house of Eli, a priest, caused it to be removed.

Seven tribes were yet unprovided for, and Joshua sent out three men from each tribe to view the land, and, when they returned, he divided it amongst them.

Benjamin's lot included Jericho and Gilgal, of which we have read. Bethel was also here, and Gibeon.

Simeon's lot included Beersheba and Ziklag, of which we shall read when we come to the history of David.

In Zebulon's lot was Mount Carmel, in which Elijah, the prophet, afterwards put to shame the priests of Baal. Here also was Nazareth, where Jesus spent so much time when he was upon earth, and the coast of the sea of Galilee, where he preached, and Mount Tabor, where he was transfigured, or showed forth his glory.

In Issachar's lot was Jezreel, where was afterwards Ahab's palace, and also Shunem, where lived the Shunammite that entertained Elisha, and the mountains of Gilboa, on which Saul and Jonathan were slain.

In Asher's lot was no famous place, but very near it were the famous Tyre and Sidon, of which we often read in the Bible, and



SHILOH.





THE DEAD SEA.

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some suppose that the Canaanites took refuge there when they were driven out of Canaan.

In the lot of Naphtali stood Capernaum and Bethsaida, in which Christ did so many mighty works.

Lastly, to the lot of Dan fell the rich country near which was the valley of Eschol, where the spies gathered the famous bunch of grapes.

And now Joshua had a right to some portion for himself, and he chose Timnath-serah, in Mount Ephraim, which was his own tribe, and near to Shiloh where the ark was, and near which Joshua loved to dwell; for the good man always loves the spot where God is worshipped. So Joshua built the city which had been broken down, and dwelt therein.*

THE TWENTIETH CHAPTER OF JOSHUA, TO THE END OF THE BOOK.

Three more Cities of Refuge—Cities given to the Levites—Return home of the two Tribes and a half—Death of Joshua.

“So Joshua let the people depart, every man unto his inheritance.”—Chap. xxiv. 28.

You recollect that Moses had set apart three cities on the other side Jordan, for cities of refuge, called Bezer, Ramoth, and Golan, and now Joshua fixes on three other cities in the land of Canaan. As I have already told you about these cities, I need only name those added by Joshua and the princes of Israel. “And they appointed Kedesh in Galilee in Mount Naphtali, and Shechem in Mount Ephraim, and Kirjath-arba (which is Hebron) in the mountain of Judah.”

* For many observations on the last two chapters, the author is indebted to Matthew Henry.





No part of the country had as yet been given to the Levites, and now forty-eight cities were divided amongst them out of the lots of all the tribes.

You recollect also that an army of the Reubenites, the Gadites, and the half tribe of Manasseh, had left their lands on the other side Jordan, that they might help their brethren in conquering Canaan; and having honourably kept their word, as all good men will do, Joshua now sends them home, charging them to love the Lord, to walk in his ways, and to keep his commandments. "And when Joshua sent them away also unto their tents, then he blessed them. And he spake unto them, saying, Return with much riches unto your tents, and with very much cattle, with silver and with gold, and with brass and with iron, and with very much raiment: divide the spoil of your enemies with your brethren."

You see that nothing is lost by serving God; for this war was under his command, to punish the wicked nations of Canaan, and in doing it, the Israelites had obeyed the divine will.

When the tribes that were sent home reached the river Jordan, which they had to cross, they built a great altar, probably on their own side, which they intended should be a monument for future times, to remind their children, and their brethren's children, of the other tribes, that they all served the one true God and not the gods of the heathen.

They had not, however, told their brethren in Canaan what they were going to do, and seeing this great altar built, these supposed that the two tribes and a half were going to worship God there, contrary to his command, that they should take all their burnt-offerings and sacrifices to the place which he should choose, which was Shiloh. (See Deuteronomy xii. 5, 6, 7.) Immediately all the people assembled at Shiloh, that they might go to war with their brethren, to punish them for their disobedience; for they would not now pass by even their own brethren, if they were wicked, without chastising them.

However, they remembered that God had commanded them always to inquire and make search, that they might be sure in





such a case, and not destroy the innocent. So they sent Phinehas, the son of Eleazar the priest, and ten princes, one chief of each house, and they asked their brethren what mischief they had been doing. And they told them how God had before punished Israel for not minding his laws, when Zimri and the Midianitish woman were slain, and twenty-four thousand people died of the plague in one day; and also about Achan taking what God had forbidden any one to touch, for which wrath came upon Israel. This showed that God's chastisements had now done them good, since they were afraid of again offending him.

Then the two tribes and a half told their brethren that they were quite mistaken, that they had no wish to offend that God who had been so good to them, but only meant that the altar should be there to remind their children of the altar of the true God at Shiloh, whom they all now loved and served.

So Phinehas and the other messengers returned to their brethren, and when the mistake was explained, "The thing pleased the children of Israel, and the children of Israel blessed God, and did not intend to go up against them in battle, to destroy the land wherein the children of Reuben and Gad dwelt. And the children of Reuben and the children of Gad called the altar *Ed*: (which means a *witness*)—for, said they, "it shall be a witness between us, that the Lord is God."

"And it came to pass a long time after that the Lord had given rest to Israel from all their enemies round about, that Joshua waxed (or became) old and stricken (or advanced) in age." So he sent for all the chief men of Israel, and he exhorted them, as they would be safe and happy, that they would all mind and serve God. And he again gathered together all the heads of the tribes of Israel, and he told them of all that God had done for them in old time; and what he had done in Canaan, where he had sent the hornets, or great wasps, to sting and drive out their enemies, instead of their always slaying them with the sword; and where he had given them a land full of fruit without their labour, and cities and houses to live in, which they had





never built. And Joshua entreated them to serve so good a God, and told them that if they served strange gods it would be to their hurt. "And the people said unto Joshua, the Lord our God will we serve, and his voice will we obey." So Joshua made a covenant, or solemn agreement, with the people that day, that they would serve God with all their hearts. And he wrote their promise in a book, and set up a great stone, under an oak, near the sanctuary of the Lord, that it might be a witness to remind them of what they had promised to do, and that they might see it as often as they went to worship: "And Joshua said unto all the people, Behold, this stone shall be a witness unto us; for it hath heard all the words of the Lord, which he spake unto us." A stone, indeed, could not hear; but Joshua meant, that it was there when he spoke to Israel, and, as it would stand for some ages, it should be as good a witness as if it knew every word that was spoken, inasmuch as his own hand had set it up on the occasion. "It shall be, therefore," said he, "a witness unto you, lest ye deny your God."

"And it came to pass after these things, that Joshua, the son of Nun, the servant of the Lord died, being an hundred and ten years old. And they buried him in the border of his inheritance, in Timnath-serah, which is in mount Ephraim, on the north side of the hill of Gaash."

About this time the bones of Joseph, which had been brought out of Egypt, were buried "in Shechem, in a parcel of ground which Jacob had bought of the sons of Hamor, the father of Shechem, for an hundred pieces of silver, and it became the inheritance of the children of Joseph."

Now, too, Eleazar the priest, and "the son of Aaron died, and they buried him in a hill that pertained to Phinehas his son which was given him in mount Ephraim."

Thus, my dear young reader, good men die one after another; but while their bodies lie in the grave and turn to dust, till God shall raise them all fresh and beautiful, their spirits return to Him whom they love; and, after having served him on earth, they now serve him in heaven, where they are happy with him forever and ever.





THE BOOK OF JUDGES,

OR

THE HISTORY OF THE GENERALS WHO RULED AND COMMANDED ISRAEL AFTER THE DEATH OF JOSHUA.

THE FIRST, SECOND, AND THIRD CHAPTERS OF JUDGES.

King Adoni-bezek punished—Othniel judges Israel—Ehud judges and kills king Eglon—Shamgar kills the Philistines with an ox-goad.

- “And the anger of the Lord was hot against Israel, and he delivered them into the hands of spoilers that spoiled them, and he sold them into the hands of their enemies round about, so that they could not any longer stand before their enemies.
- “Whithersoever they went out, the hand of the Lord was against them for evil, as the Lord had said, and as the Lord had sworn unto them; and they were greatly distressed.
- “Nevertheless the Lord raised up judges, which delivered them out of the hand of those that spoiled them.”—Chap. ii. 14—16.

Before we begin the Book of Judges, I must just tell you, that Judges here do not mean such judges as we have, who are only to sit in courts of law, and see that justice is done to those who are tried before them; but, as I have said at the head of the chapter, the judges of the Israelites were rulers and chiefs, and,





when the Israelites were in distress because of the attacks of the Canaanites which yet remained, the Lord raised up these men to deliver Israel and lead them to battle.

Some time after the death of Joshua, and when the Israelites were more in number, they asked counsel of the Lord about going to battle to get more of the land from the Canaanites which remained. And God commanded Judah to attack them.

Judah then got the tribe of Simeon to join with them, and promised to help them to make them stronger in return, when they needed aid. We should always try and do kindnesses to one another.

The Canaanites were soon beaten, and king Adoni-bezek was taken prisoner. This king must have been a great conqueror, but now he is conquered, and as he had done to others, so God now suffered it should be done to him. He had no less than threescore and ten, which is three twenties and ten, that is, seventy kings, who were his prisoners, and these he used to feed with what was left, as they sat under his table, having first cruelly mangled them by cutting off their thumbs and their great toes. What he had done to them the Israelites now did to him, which was, no doubt, an act of God's justice, or else such cruelty would have been very wicked. The king himself felt that God had done this: "And Adoni-bezek said, Threescore and ten kings, having their thumbs and their great toes cut off, gathered their meat under my table: as I have done, so God hath requited me. And they brought him to Jerusalem, and there he died."

This should teach you and me to do unto others as we would that they should do unto us, were we in the like situation; for, had this king not been so cruel to others, he would, perhaps, not have suffered so himself; at all events, he would have been spared the reproaches of his own conscience, which now told him how cruelly he had behaved to those who fell into his hands.

Judah's part of Jerusalem was now completely conquered, a king of which city Joshua had before taken. The tribe of Judah also took Hebron, and Gaza, and Askelon, and Ekron, and other places. Indeed, they beat all that dwelt in the mountains, but there were some that dwelt in the valleys who used iron war-





chariots, which could not be used in the mountains, and the tribe of Judah were foolishly frightened at them, "because they had chariots of iron," as if these could save them, when God had resolved to destroy them. So, on account of their cowardice, they could not drive out the inhabitants of the valley, and they remained to be their plagues.

You will here find the same story, about Caleb's giving his daughter to Othniel to be his wife, which was told in the fifteenth of Joshua, when Caleb's name was mentioned as receiving his lot among the children of Judah, to which tribe he belonged.

I have said that Judah's part of Jerusalem was conquered, for this city stood partly in the lot of Judah, and partly in the lot of Benjamin, and Judah had only taken their own part, which was the southern part, but the northern part they left for the tribe of Benjamin to conquer, but they did not drive out the Jebusites who dwelt there; and there they remained when the Book of Judges was written.

Then the house of Joseph took Bethel, part of which belonged to Benjamin, and the other part to Ephraim. The tribe of Manasseh were very indolent, and left the Canaanites to hold several cities in their lot. Ephraim, also, neglected Gezer, a large city, and left the Canaanites to dwell there. Zebulun were alike careless about enlarging their lot, and only made the Canaanites in it to pay them some taxes for letting them alone. As for those of Asher, they even dwelt among the Canaanites, and let them hold their lot. Naphtali did the same, except that they made the people pay them something for remaining quiet. Dan was forced into the mountains, and durst not go into the valleys given to them.

We shall see by and by what the Israelites got by their cowardice and neglect in not taking all of the lots which Joshua had given them, and what miseries they brought upon themselves by living among the Canaanites. What ease or advantage soever we may get by living among wicked people, we shall be sure to suffer for it in the end; and therefore all good people try to avoid their company, and never unite with them any more than they can help.





God now sent an angel, or messenger, who was either a prophet, or the same divine person who had before appeared to Jacob and Joshua; and he told the people how they had sinned against God by sparing the Canaanites, whom he had commanded them to destroy, and that now they should be as thorns in their sides, which would wound them severely, and their gods should be a snare to them, and they would fall into the sin of idolatry, or worshipping of them.

At this message the Israelites all wept, and they called the spot by the name Bochim, which signifies weepers, and they sacrificed there unto the Lord. This Bochim was, probably, that place which was before called Shiloh, as they now sacrificed to the Lord there; and they would have done wrong to have sacrificed to him except where he had commanded his altar to be built.

We are then told about the people's history, which goes back to Joshua's days, when the people served the Lord; and then we are told what they did after his death: "They did evil in the sight of the Lord, and served Baalim," or false gods. And God was angry with them, and he delivered them into the hands of their enemies. Then when they cried to God, he sent them judges or generals to save them; and, when these died, they returned again and again to their wickedness. So God left the nations of Canaan to plague and to humble them. These were called Canaanites, Philistines, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites, Jebusites, and other names.

Now, when Israel "took their daughters to be their wives, and gave their daughters to their sons, and served their gods," the anger of the Lord was hot against Israel, that is to say, he treated Israel as one would treat another when his anger is hot; though, as I think I have before told you, God cannot be moved with anger, and sin as we do.

Well, to show Israel how much he was displeased, he sold them, or parted with them, so as no longer to take special care of them, and let the king of Mesopotamia rule over them, which he did for eight years. But, when they found that he treated them very cruelly, then they cried to the Lord, and he was so kind that he pitied them, though they had behaved so ill towards





him, and he gave his spirit to Othniel the son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother, "and he judged Israel and went out to war," and God delivered Israel from the cruel king, and "the land had rest forty years."

After Othniel, the first judge, was dead, "the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of the Lord." O what a wicked people were they! and yet, my reader, how often do we repeat our offences against God after we have said we would do so no more. How merciful is God that he still spares us, and is still ready to pardon us for Christ's sake!

God now "strengthened Eglon, the king of Moab, against Israel." And he smote Israel, and the people served him eighteen years.

Then Israel cried to God again, and O what a God is he to hear prayer! for when they prayed to him in earnest,—which is what is meant by crying to God,—then he raised up another deliverer. This was "Ehud, the son of Gera, a Benjamite, a man left-handed," or, as some suppose, who could use his left hand as well as his right.

This Ehud was sent from the children of Israel to take a present, or as it is thought, to take the taxes which Eglon had made Israel pay. So Ehud made a dagger of two edges, as long as his arm, and he put it under his garments, on his right thigh. The sword is mostly put on the left side, but that is for the purpose of being drawn by the right hand; here it was put to be drawn by his left hand; and perhaps he might bind it for the use of his left hand, to escape any observation that he wore one. When Ehud had offered the present, he sent away the people that were with him, and then going back, he said to the king, "I have a secret errand for thee, O king." The king thought he had something very important to say, and commanded all to be silent, and then sent his state servants away. Eglon was in a lonely room, built for the sake of quiet, and made very airy and cool, to use in the summer, in that part of the world where it is so hot. Then Ehud went near to him and said, "I have a message from God unto thee." The king rose to receive him with respect, and at that moment he ran him through the body, and being a very fat man, he fell heavily and died, yet no one heard what had happened.





Ehud now shut the doors and locked them, and took the key, and passing quietly by the guards, he escaped.

The servants now returned to attend the king, but, finding the doors fast, they thought the king was asleep. "He covereth his feet," said they; for, as they wore slippers, when they went to sleep on a sofa, they dropped them, and wrapped them round in the tail of their long garment. At length, however, after waiting a very long time, the servants feared that all was not right, and having got a key they opened the doors, "And, behold their lord was fallen down dead on the earth."

All this time Ehud was getting safely away, and, having escaped to his people, he blew a trumpet in mount Ephraim, and he said to the children of Israel that came to him, "Follow after me; for the Lord hath delivered your enemies, the Moabites, into your hands." Now the Moabites had, probably, placed soldiers among the Israelites to keep them in slavery; so the Israelites went to the fords of Jordan, or places where they must pass home, and, as the Moabitish soldiers were trying to return home on hearing of the death of their king, Ehud slew them. "And they slew of Moab, at that time, about ten thousand men, all lusty, and all men of valour; and there escaped not a man" of all that had been oppressing Israel. "And the land had rest fourscore (or eighty) years."

For any man now to do what Ehud did it would be murder; but he was the man whom God raised up to to punish a wicked king, and act as his judge; and God showed his approval of what he did by saving Israel through his deed.

After Ehud was "Shamgar, the son of Anath, which slew of the Philistines six hundred men with an ox-goad: and he also delivered Israel."

Some think that Shamgar was only a commander under Ehud, and not a judge. He was, however, a brave man. The Philistines were very troublesome neighbours to the Israelites, and plundered them wherever they could get at them, so that, in the fifth chapter, we read that in the days of Shamgar, "the highways were unoccupied;" that is, people were afraid of going on the great roads, lest they should meet the Philistine robbers, "and the travellers walked through bye-ways," or roads not generally used.





Shamgar, like most of the Israelites, was engaged in working his fields, when some of the Philistines came, perhaps, to take away his crops. So Shamgar and his companions fought them, relying upon God for strength to drive them away ; and he, being a strong man, seized an ox-goad, which used to be about three yards long, with an iron pike at one end, to drive the ox, and a sharp spade at the other end, to clean the plough. With this he himself slew six hundred men ; they having, no doubt, soon taken flight, and been pursued by Shamgar and his friends. This courageous defence delivered Israel from these robbers.

THE FOURTH, FIFTH, SIXTH, SEVENTH, AND EIGHTH CHAPTERS OF
JUDGES.

Deborah a Prophetess, and Barak, judge Israel—The woman Jael kills Sisera, a great Captain—The triumphant Song of Deborah and Barak—Gideon judges Israel—Gideon's Exploits and Death.

“So let all thine enemies perish, O Lord : but let them that love him be as the sun when he goeth forth in his might.”—Chap. v. 31.

“And the children of Israel again did evil in the sight of the Lord, when Ehud was dead.” They did evil **again**. Oh, how many times they did evil ! Alas ! my reader, and so do we. O, what should we do, if God did not pardon sin for Christ's sake ! Yet we must not sin because God is so ready to pardon ; this is, indeed, to be wicked ; but we must pray that when he is so ready to forgive us, we may “go and sin no more.”

As former punishment did not cure the children of Israel, they were again made slaves, and obliged to work to pay heavy taxes to a foreign king called Jabin, who reigned in a place called Hazor, and he was very powerful, “for he had nine hundred chariots of iron, and twenty years he mightily oppressed the children of Israel.”





So God raised up Deborah a prophetess, a woman to whom he gave his Spirit to foretell things. And, when Israel again cried unto the Lord, she foresaw their deliverance. And she sent for Barak, and told him to command the armies; and what he should do, and how God would help him. So at her desire he collected "ten thousand men of the children of Naphtali, and of the children of Zebulun," and at Barak's request she went with them to direct them, because God had given her so much wisdom.

Now Sisera, the chief general, or commander-in-chief of the armies of Jabin, soon heard what Barak was doing, and he collected all his chariots of iron, nine hundred in number, and a large army of foot soldiers; and he thought probably that he could surround the Israelites who were on the Mount Tabor.

Jewish writers say, that when Barak saw the large army of Jabin, he was quite frightened, but Deborah encouraged him, and said, "This is the day in which the Lord hath delivered Sisera into thine hand." So Barak went down from mount Tabor, and ten thousand men after him. "And the Lord discomfited, or defeated, Sisera, and all his chariots, and all his host, with the edge of the sword, before Barak;" so that, in order to get away faster, "Sisera lighted down off his chariot and fled away on his feet. But Barak pursued after the chariots, and after the host." "And all the host of Sisera fell upon the edge of the sword, and there was not a man left."

Sisera ran away from his army, and being invited by a woman named Jael, he hid himself in her tent, and "she covered him over with a mantle or cloak." And he was very thirsty with fatigue, and asked her for a little water, when she opened a bottle and gave him some milk. Now he was quite inclined to sleep, being so much tired with fighting and running; and he begged Jael, if any one asked about him, to say that he was not there. Jael, however, did not promise any such thing, for she knew it would be a wicked lie.

As soon as Sisera was asleep, she took a long nail, which was used in fastening the tent, and she boldly drove it into his temples, so as to fasten his head into the ground.





Barak was seeking after Sisera, but could not find him. At last he came near Jael's tent, and she ran to meet him, and told him she would show him his enemy; and there lay the general dead, with the nail driven through his head.

This would have been a very wicked and treacherous act, had not Jael, no doubt, been prompted to do it, as an act of justice to God's foes, and the foes of his people.

And now the Israelites were resolved to rid the country of this tyrant of Canaan. "And the hand of the children of Israel prospered, and prevailed against Jabin, king of Canaan, until they had destroyed Jabin, king of Canaan."

Then, according to the custom of the times, the conquerors made a song of victory to sing of the defeat of Sisera; and that this deliverance might not be forgotten, but be remembered as in a history. You may read this song in the fifth chapter of Judges. But you must remember that it is poetry; and in poetry we may talk in what we call figures; and make trees, and mountains, and rivers, to do things which, in reality, they do not, but which are intended to show other things in a way that is more grand than any we can describe in prose. So here you will read of the mountains melting and the stars fighting; the former meaning that difficulties as great as getting over high mountains were overcome; and the latter, that God made even the stars to help his Israel when they prayed to him, perhaps by their brightly shining on the night of Sisera's defeat, and on future occasions, so as to aid Israel in pursuing their enemies.

This song also goes back to the former state of Israel and God's deliverances. When none could live in villages for fear of being killed by their oppressors; when they forgot God and chose new gods—the false gods of the heathen made of wood or of stone; and when their foes had so subdued them, that out of forty thousand men, not one had a shield or spear to fight with in his defence, their enemies having taken all their arms away.

Then Deborah and Barak say, "Speak, ye that ride on white asses," meaning the rich people, who rode on them as ours do on fine horses. "Bless ye the Lord." No archers now infest you, as they used to do at the wells, when you went to water your flocks





your enemies drove you away and took your water, but now you may lead them in peace to "the places of drawing water."

Then, the song tells of those tribes that behaved bravely in opposing their enemies; and of Reuben, who were divided among themselves, and lived in their sheep-folds, instead of helping their brethren; and of Dan and Asher, who minded their ships on the sea-coast, and cared not for their brethren surrounded by enemies; and of the people of Meroz, who would not help in a time of need. These were named, that they might be thought of with disgrace, because they did not as God bid them, in driving the Canaanites out of the land.

Lastly, the victory over Sisera is sung, which I think you can, by a little reflection, perfectly understand.

Again, we find Israel doing evil, "and the Lord delivered them into the hand of Midian seven years. And the Israelites were so cruelly treated, that they left their towns, and went and hid in caves or hollow places in the rocks. For, when they had sown their land, the Midianites wantonly destroyed the crop, and left no food for man or beast.

Now Israel cried again to God, and they never cried in vain, for he will hear sincere prayer.

And God sent a prophet to the children of Israel, to tell them of their sins in forsaking him, and to cheer them. And an angel of the Lord appeared to Gideon, the son of Joash, as he threshed wheat by the wine-press, that the Midianites might not find it out. "And the Lord looked upon him and said, Go in this thy might, and thou shalt save Israel from the hand of the Midianites; have not I sent thee?"

And Gideon asked for some sign, that he might be sure he was right in trying to become a judge of Israel. Then he went and got something for the angel to eat, not knowing that he was an angel, as he looked like a man. And when he brought out a kid and some cakes, the angel told him to put them on a rock which





was close by, and he touched them with a staff, which he had in his hand, and fire came out of the rock and consumed them.

Then the angel vanished away, and Gideon knew by this sign that he was not a man.

Gideon was now frightened, and he thought as he had seen an angel, that he should die, but God spoke to his mind, "Thou shalt not die." And Gideon was then satisfied, and built an altar to praise God, and he called it Jehovah-shalom, which means, *The Lord peace* ; or, as we understand it, "*The Lord send peace.*"

On the same night God commanded Gideon to throw down his father's altar, built to the false god, Baal : and to cut down the grove that was planted round it, and to build an altar to Him, and sacrifice the bullock upon it. So Gideon did so by night, and took ten of his father's servants to help him.

In the morning the men of the city saw what Gideon had done, but they did not know who did it. And at last they found out that it was Gideon, and they were very angry, and wanted to kill him. But Gideon's father said, "Let Baal kill him if he can, but do not you kill him ;" and you know, young reader, that a wooden god could not, and so his father saved his life ; and he called his name, after that, Jerubbaal, which means, let *Baal plead*, that is, let Baal defend himself.

Now the Midianites and the Amalekites pitched in the valley of Jezreel, and the Spirit of the Lord came upon Gideon, and he blew the war-trumpet, and called many of the tribes of Israel to help him. And he would fain know if God was pleased with what he was doing, and so he asked God for two signs. First, he would put a piece of fleece of wool off a sheep's back upon the floor, and if the wool were all wet, and the floor dry, he should believe that God was with him to help him ; and the fleece was so wet, that he wrung a bowl full of water out of it, while the floor was dry. Still Gideon did not know what to do, and he asked God for another sign, and that was to be the reverse of this, for the fleece should be dry, and the floor wet ; "and God did so that night : for it was dry upon the fleece only, and there was dew upon all the ground."





These were miracles, or things out of the course of nature, and not to be done by man at all—for who could know the secret wish of Gideon's mind?—nor to be done by God, but on any wonderful occasion. And, by these miracles, Gideon was encouraged to prepare himself to deliver Israel.

Gideon now took his army and pitched by the side of the well of Harod. And God told Gideon that he had too many soldiers, for they would be apt to be proud after the victory, and to say, "Mine own hand hath saved me;" so Gideon was to tell all that were afraid to go back to their homes, and out of thirty-two thousand, only ten thousand remained behind, twenty-two thousand being afraid. Still there were too many; so God commanded Gideon to take them to the water to drink, and some lapped, or dipped up the water with their hands, and then lapped it with their tongues, while the others knelt down to drink it, and God told Gideon that those who lapped should go with him to the battle, and no more. How many do you suppose there were that God would have to fight a great army of the Midianites? Why, only three hundred! So the people took victuals in their hand, and their trumpets, and Gideon sent all the rest away; "and the host of Midian was beneath him in the valley."

The same night the Lord told Gideon that he was to beat the Midianites, but if he had still any fear, he was to take a companion, and go and visit their camp in secret. And he did so, and the enemy covered the ground, and their camels which carried their luggage were too many in number.

Now, a Midianitish soldier dreamt that a cake of barley-bread tumbled into the host of Midian, and overturned a tent. And he told it to his fellow-soldier that was near him, and he said, "This is the sword of Gideon," "for into his hand hath God delivered Midian and all his host." Gideon was near and heard this, for God made the soldier dream, and taught the other to explain it, and caused Gideon to hear it, that his heart might not be afraid. So Gideon worshipped God, and returned full of courage.

And now he took an odd method to fight the Midianites. He divided his three hundred men into three companies of one hundred each; "and he put a trumpet in every man's hand, with empty





SAMSON CARRYING OFF THE GATES OF GAZA.



SAMSON AND THE LION.



J.W. ORR. N.Y.



pitchers, and lamps within the pitchers, and he ordered every man to do every thing that he should do."

So about midnight, when the Midianites were fast asleep, he marched quietly with his little army to the outside of their camp. And he blew his trumpet, and all the three hundred blew theirs. And then he smashed his pitcher, and all the rest smashed theirs, which they held in their left hands. And, lo, in a moment there were three hundred lights! And then they shouted, "The sword of the Lord and of Gideon." No wonder that the Midianites were afraid, especially as God had resolved to destroy them, for they must have thought, at the moment, that there was a large army indeed behind, when there were no less than three hundred trumpeters, and three hundred light-bearers besides, as they probably imagined. So, they thought their best way was to flee; indeed, when a man awakes out of sleep in a fright, he hardly knows what to do. "All the host ran, and cried, and fled." And every man killed his fellow, not knowing him from a foe.

And Gideon sent for the men of Ephraim to pursue after the flying army, and they did so, and they took and slew Oreb and Zeeb, two Midianitish princes.

The Ephraimites were, however, very angry with Gideon, that they had not been called sooner to battle; but Gideon said, "Is not the gleanings of the grapes of Ephraim better than the vintage of Abiezer?" Here he spoke in what we call a figure, and compared the field of battle to a vineyard, and told the children of Ephraim that they need not be dissatisfied, for they had gleaned more from what was left for them, than the men of Abiezer, who formed the most part of his little army, had got from all the vintage or crop of grapes: meaning that after the battle was fought, Ephraim had taken the greatest spoils, "For," said he, "God hath delivered into your hands the princes of Midian, Oreb and Zeeb: and what was I able to do in comparison of you? Then their anger was abated toward him, when he had said that." Had he been a foolish boaster, and said, "What fine things I have done!" he would both have displeased God, who gave him the victory, and have made them angry.

Gideon and his three hundred men went after the enemy, as





well as did the Ephraimites, and they crossed the river Jordan very faint with fatigue. And Gideon asked the people of Succoth for some loaves for his men, but they would not give him any; fearing perhaps that the Midianites might return and punish them for helping Gideon. Then he asked the people of another place called Penuel, but they also refused him. So he told the men of Succoth he would make them smart for their cruelty to his poor troops, on his return; and the men of Penuel should have their strong tower knocked about their ears. Now, if this had been petty revenge, it would have been wrong, but Gideon was now a judge, and he threatened them on account of his office.

Having finished his pursuit, and taken two kings of Midian, after whom he was in search, he returned and punished seventy-seven of the ruling men of Succoth, who had behaved so cruelly to his people, and they were whipped with thorns and briers. And he "beat down the tower of Penuel, and slew the men of the city."

Zebah and Zalmunna had been to Tabor, and had slain Gideon's brothers there, whom they might have taken prisoners only. Gideon, having heard this, asked them about it, and they confessed the fact. Then he ordered his eldest son to slay them, but being a youth, he was timid and could not. They then asked Gideon to do it, that they might fall by more noble hands; and they thought, he being a strong man, that they should die instantly without pain. And Gideon killed them, and he took the ornaments from the necks of their camels.

The people of Israel were delighted with Gideon's bravery and success, and asked him to be their king, but he would not.

To keep up the remembrance of this victory, he asked them to give him the golden ear-rings which they had taken from the Midianites, and he made out of them a sacred garment, called an Ephod; partly, perhaps, mixing the gold with the garment, and paying for other costly materials with the rest. This ephod, if nothing else was made out of the gold, was worth more than three thousand pounds. But some think that he made a little tabernacle with it, putting in it all the furniture for worship. In doing so he did what was wrong, because God had fixed one





place at his command, for the purpose of worship, and none were to fix another. The consequence was, that the people made an idol of the ephod, and foolishly worshipped it.

Gideon having died in a good old age, was buried in the sepulchre of Joash his father. But no sooner was he dead than all Israel went again after the false gods of the heathen; and as for Gideon, they quite forgot him, and cared nothing for his family of seventy sons which he had left behind him, though, through his victories, the land had enjoyed quietness forty years.

THE NINTH CHAPTER OF JUDGES.

King Abimelech.

“And all the men of Shechem gathered together, and all the house of Milo, and went and made Abimelech king, by the plain of the pillar that was in Shechem.”—Ver. 6.

And now Israel were all in confusion without a leader, and instead of being given up to foreign enemies, they were punished for their idolatry, by being let loose against each other.

Besides his seventy sons, who were his heirs, Gideon left one by a concubine, or wife, whose son was not allowed to inherit or share any part of his property. This young man was, however, very ambitious, or desirous of being above all the rest in power. So he went to Shechem, where his mother's brethren lived, and he persuaded them to make him king. “For,” said he, “if you do not choose me, you will have all Gideon's other sons for kings, and is it not better to support one than seventy? Besides, I am your relation, and they care nothing about you; if I am king, I may do you some service.” So they gave him money out of their idol's temple, and he hired a set of base fellows to protect him, and he went and killed his brethren, that he might have the





throne to himself; one only escaping out of the seventy, which was Jotham, the youngest son of Jerubbaal, or Gideon.

Now Jotham was a wise young man, and he went and warned the people against his wicked half-brother. And he told them a parable, to get their attention. He said that the trees met to choose a king; but the most noble trees, the olive, the fig-tree, and the vine, would not be kings, but chose to do good in a different way; but a bramble, which is a mean and scratching thing, and will tear you to pieces, had the audacity to accept of the honour, and looked very great. Here he meant that neither his father, nor the other judges before him, would be made kings, but, at last, a mean and wicked man had taken the high rank which they refused. Well, if they ever prospered with such a king, they had done well, but time would soon prove. And when he had warned them he escaped. This is the oldest fable in the world; which, under the representation of trees talking, concealed the talk of men, which all the while he meant. It is very amusing, and was very wise, for not at first knowing his meaning, the people heard all he had to say, which, had he spoken out at first, they would not have done. You may read the parable at length in this chapter.

Abimelech had only reigned three years over Israel, when he quarrelled with the men of Shechem: and they used to rob Abimelech's men as they met them on the roads, and they cursed Abimelech. So Abimelech went and fought them, and killed them all, and destroyed their city, and sowed it with salt, which was a sign then used that the city should be built no more. Still the tower of the city was not taken, so Abimelech took his men to the top of a mountain, and took an axe with him, and told them to do as he did; and he cut down a large bough from a tree and put it on his shoulder, and his men did the same. And then they went to the tower, piled the huge heap of wood round it, set it on fire and burnt all the people that remained there, which were "about a thousand men and women." Then the king went to a place called Thebez, and took that, but the people fled to a strong tower which was in their city. And the king thought to burn this as he had done the other. So he went to the door to set the





wood on fire, when a woman threw a large mill-stone from the top, and it fell upon his head and broke his skull. He had, however, sense enough left to know who did it; and, as he thought it was disgraceful to be killed by a woman, he begged his armour-bearer, or the man that carried his heavy shield, and perhaps his spear, that he would run him through, and he did so, and the king died. So God rewarded the wickedness of Abimelech in slaying his brethren, and the wickedness of the Shechemites in helping him to do so vile a deed; "and upon them came the curse of Jotham, the son of Jerubbaal," as he had told them. "The Lord is known by the judgments he executeth; the wicked is snared by the work of his own hands."

THE TENTH, ELEVENTH, AND TWELFTH CHAPTERS OF JUDGES.

Jeptha's Vow—The Ephraimites Slain.

"So Jeptha passed over unto the children of Ammon to fight against them, and the Lord delivered them into his hands."—Chap. xi. 32.

After Abimelech was dead there arose a new judge named Tola, and, in his time, which was during twenty-three years, things went on well in Israel.

Jair, a Gileadite, followed him in his office, and judged Israel twenty-two years. And he had thirty sons that helped him, and rode on asses' colts from place to place to see that things were properly done throughout the nation, and that no neighbour was unjust to another.

After Jair died, Israel returned again to false gods. Then God let the Philistines afflict them, and they and the Ammonites troubled them eighteen years.

And a large army of the Ammonites marched against Israel, who were greatly frightened, and they cried to the Lord. And





the Lord, still gracious, heard them yet again. How good was he that he did not leave Israel to perish after they had so often forsaken him! Then they confessed their sins, and trusting in God, they gathered an army to meet their enemies. But they had no general. So the princes or chiefs of Gilead offered to make him their ruler who would take the command of their armies.

Jephthah, the Gileadite, was a mighty man of valour; and he was, as some suppose, the son of a tavern-keeper, called here a *harlot*, and his mother was a strange woman, or a foreigner, so that his brethren, of another mother, would not allow him to share of their father Gilead's property, and they drove him from home.

As he was famed for his bravery, the Gileadites now thought of him, and they sent for him, and asked him to be their leader. Jephthah told them how ill they had used him, but if they would promise to obey his commands, he would come and aid them.

So Jephthah sent to the king of the Ammonites, to ask why he had invaded or entered with armies into his country. And the king made some excuses about some quarrels which had happened several hundred years before; for when bad people want to quarrel, they can always find some excuse for it.

Then Jephthah accused the king of intending wickedly to shed blood, and he appealed to God to be his help. You can read the particulars in the eleventh chapter of Judges.

And now the Spirit of the Lord came upon Jephthah, and he resolved to meet his foe. And he vowed to the Lord, that if he defeated him, he would, on his return, offer to him the first thing he met as a sacrifice of thanksgiving.

He soon defeated the children of Ammon, and on his return was first met by his own and only daughter and child. It was often the custom for women to go out with music and dancing to meet the conqueror on his return. She went so to meet her father, and being the first object he saw, he remembered his vow, and he rent his clothes, which was the sign of great grief used among the Israelites.

"Alas, my daughter!" said he, "thou hast brought me very low, and thou art one of them that trouble me; for I have opened my mouth unto the Lord, and cannot go back." And she, a most





kind, obedient daughter, who loved her father, said unto him, "My father, if thou hast opened thy mouth unto the Lord, do to me according to that which hath proceeded out of thy mouth; forasmuch as the Lord hath taken vengeance for thee of thine enemies, even of the children of Ammon."

Then she begged of her father to let her have two months to mourn over her early separation from the world, and that she should die without being a mother, which was a grief to a woman of Israel, as each one hoped that the Messiah or Christ should be born in her family.

"At the end of the two months, she returned to her father, who did with her according to his vow."

Now, some suppose that she was slain and offered up for a burnt-offering; but it is strange that any, and more so that many have had such a notion. The heathen offered human sacrifices, but God would have abhorred so brutal and unnatural a deed. Besides, Jephthah might have paid a ransom, and have rescued his daughter from death, if she had even been so vowed to the Lord. (See Leviticus, chap. xxvii. 4.) But she was only separated for ever from the world, and made a kind of priestess to serve God all the days of her life. And every year the daughters of Israel went to condole her on her misfortune, in being separated from the mothers of Israel.

The Ephraimites, who had before quarrelled with Gideon, now quarrelled with Jephthah. It is very unfortunate to live with or near quarrelsome people, who make both themselves and others unhappy. They were offended that they had not been called to share in the triumphs of Jephthah, when he went out to battle, though, when he had before asked them, they would not go. So, they abused Jephthah and the Gileadites, and called them hard names, and represented them as a set of vagabonds. From words they came to blows, and a great battle was fought. The Ephraimites were beaten and ran away, and as they had to pass some of the fords of Jordan, where the water was most shallow, in order to get home, the Gileadites went and stopped there to meet them. And, as they tried to pass, they asked them if they were Ephraimites. To save their lives, they told a lie, and said—No. But





this would not do. For there was a word which means a river or stream, which the Ephraimites pronounced in a particular way : this word was *Shibboleth*, but they called it *Sibboleth*, and could not pronounce the *h*. So, you know, in our own country, people of different counties sound some letters in different ways.

Well, when the Ephraimites denied who they were, "Then," said the Gileadites, "say now *Shibboleth*," but they said *Sibboleth*, for they could not frame their mouths to speak the word. So they were discovered, and were all slain. And a shocking havoc it was, for "there fell at that time, of the Ephraimites, forty and two thousand."

And Jephthah judged Israel six years, "and he died and was buried in one of the cities of Gilead."

After Jephthah, Ibzan was judge for seven years.

After him, Elon for ten years.

After him, Abdon for eight years.

Then followed the famous strong man, Samson, of whose exploits we shall next tell you.

THE THIRTEENTH, FOURTEENTH, FIFTEENTH, AND SIXTEENTH
CHAPTERS OF JUDGES.

History of the Wonderful Deeds of Samson.

"And the woman bare a son, and called his name Samson : and the child grew, and the Lord blessed him."—Chap. xiii. 24.

The old and sad story is here again repeated, "And the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of the Lord, and the Lord delivered them into the hand of the Philistines forty years." Here is sin again bringing sorrow ; whenever we do evil in the sight of the Lord, we must expect that sorrow will, sooner or later, be the consequence.





While these evil doings were going on, God still had designs of mercy towards this guilty people. And he sent an angel to the wife of "a certain man of Zorah, of the family of the Danites, whose name was Manoah," and he told her that she should have a son, and that she must bring him up as a Nazarite; that is, set him apart for God's service, as he wanted to employ him. You remember reading about the law concerning the Nazarites in the sixth chapter of Numbers.

Then Manoah himself wished to see this divine messenger, and so he prayed God to send him again, that he might know more about what he was to do with his son. And the angel appeared again to his wife, and she fetched her husband, and he saw the angel.

As he appeared in the form of a man, perhaps Manoah took him for some great prophet sent from afar, so he asked him to eat, and begged him to wait till he got ready a kid for him. But the angel told him he would not eat, and if he chose to make any offering, he must do it to the Lord and not to him. Manoah then wanted to know his name, that, when his word came to pass, he might know who was the prophet. But the angel said his name was a secret.

"So Manoah took a kid with a meat-offering, and offered it upon a rock unto the Lord; and the angel did wondrously, and Manoah and his wife looked on." Probably he caused fire to arise out of the rock, and consume the sacrifice, for the next verse says, "For it came to pass, when the flame went up towards heaven from off the altar, that the angel of the Lord ascended in the flame of the altar. And Manoah and his wife looked on it, and fell on their faces to the ground. But the angel of the Lord did no more appear to Manoah and to his wife. Then Manoah knew that he was an angel of the Lord."

And now, as Gideon before, as we learn in the sixth chapter, having seen an angel, Manoah was greatly frightened, and thought he should instantly die, having the same notion, that such a sight was soon followed by death. But his wife comforted him, and said, "If the Lord were pleased to kill us, he would not have received a burnt-offering and a meat-offering at our hands; nei-





ther would he have showed us all these things, nor would, as at this time, have told us such things as these."

So Samson was born, and grew up, "and the Spirit of the Lord began to move him at times in the camp of Dan."

When Samson became a young man, he went to a place called Timnath, which belonged to the Philistines, and there he saw a young woman that he chose for his wife. This was against the commands of God (see Deut. vii. 3), but in this case, "it was of the Lord," to permit him to please his eye, as God overruled this event to make Samson the avenger of Israel against the Philistines.

Samson's father and mother told him that if he married a heathen woman, he would do a very wrong thing; but he would have his own way, and he felt the consequences of breaking God's commands. "Get her for me," said he, "for she pleaseth me well." Ah, my young reader, take care of things that please you well; sin sometimes pleases us well, but God will punish us well for it, and for ever, if we do not at last repent.

Finding it of no use to argue with him, Manoah and his wife yielded, and went to Timnath to settle the matter.

On the way to Timnath, Samson was met by a young lion that ran roaring at him. "And the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon him, and he rent him as he would have rent a kid, and he had nothing in his hand: but he told not his father or his mother what he had done."

Then "he went down, and talked with the woman; and she pleased Samson well:" he liked her conversation as well as her person, and having settled matters, "after a time he returned to take her, and he turned aside to see the carcase of the lion: and, behold, there was a swarm of bees and honey in the carcase of the lion. And he took thereof in his hands, and went on eating, and came to his father and mother, and he gave them, and they did eat: but he told not them that he had taken the honey out of the carcase of the lion," for he meant to make a riddle from it, and that would have given them the clue.

Samson's father and mother went with Samson, and he made a feast on the occasion of his marriage, and thirty young men were invited to be at it.





Then they passed their time in making riddles and Samson gave one which he allowed the Philistines seven days to find out ; and he would then give them thirty sheets or dresses, in which the Easterns wrap themselves at night, and thirty changes of garments to wear by day, if they could tell its meaning ; but, if they could not, then they were to give him the like.

Then he told his riddle, " Out of the eater came forth meat, and out of the strong came forth sweetness." So they puzzled in vain, for three days, to find out the riddle, and when they could not find it, they went to Samson's wife and frightened her, and told her that they would burn her, and set fire to her father's house, if she did not get Samson to tell her the meaning of his riddle.

So Samson's wife " wept before him" till the seventh day came, and his heart was so touched, that at last he told her the riddle, and she told the Philistines.

Then the Philistines went to Samson on the seventh day, and gladly told him that they had found out the riddle ; " What," said they, " is sweeter than honey ? and what is stronger than a lion ?" " If ye had not ploughed with my heifer," said Samson, " ye had not found out my riddle ;" meaning, that if they had not used his wife to ask him, they would have been beaten.

So " the Spirit of the Lord came upon Samson, and he went down to Ashkelon and slew thirty men, and he took their spoil, and gave change of garments unto them which expounded the riddle." So he made one Philistine to pay the other.

Samson seems to have been angry that his wife had told her countrymen his secret, and so he left her at her father's and went home. After a while, however, he thought that he would go back for her ; but when he got to her father's house, he found that her father had married her to another one of his companions, and wanted him to take her younger sister instead of her.

Samson was then resolved that he would make the Philistines pay dear for their treatment ; so he went, perhaps assisted by others,





and caught three hundred foxes, or jackals, somewhat resembling foxes, which he might be some days in collecting, "and took fire-brands, and turned tail to tail, and put a fire-brand in the midst between two tails; and when he had set the brands on fire, he let them go into the standing corn" (or corn that was growing, and, therefore, standing and not cut down) "of the Philistines, and burnt up both the shocks, and also the standing corn, with the vineyards and olives," the latter being trees that produced them oil.

The Philistines, finding that Samson had done them this mischief, and learning the reason why, then went and burnt his wife and her father, probably by setting fire to their dwelling, and so they thought that Samson would be contented as they were punished. So you see that Samson's wife who betrayed him, lest she and her father should be burnt by the Philistines, had at last the very punishment which she tried to escape by doing what was wrong, and brought it all upon herself. The safest way to act in every thing, is to do that which is right, or in the end we shall, most likely, smart for it.

But Samson was not yet satisfied. The Philistines had used him very ill, and, though revenge is not proper, yet, in this case, God made his anger to work Israel's deliverance. So he fell upon the Philistines and "smote them hip and thigh," or heaps upon heaps, "with a great slaughter."

That one man should kill so many is odd, but if God gave him more than the common strength of a man, and let them all turn cowards, the thing is easily accounted for. It is no wonder if they fled from Samson when they saw how strong he was, for they would have fled from a lion for the same reason, and he was much stronger than a lion, as we have seen how easily he tore one of these beasts to pieces.

After this Samson went to live in a rock, which was, perhaps, a fortress, called Etam. And the Philistines got together a great number of men, and went and pitched in Judah; and the men of Judah fearing for themselves, asked the reason of this visit. And when the Philistines told them they wanted to find Samson, the men of Judah, three thousand in number, went to the top of the rock Etam, and told Samson that they were come to deliver him





to the Philistines. Was not this base of them, because Samson was one of their own countrymen, and the Philistines were all the time oppressors of Israel? Well, the cowards did not like to fall upon him, lest he should smite them, as he had smitten the Philistines, so they entreated him to deliver himself up, and he, not wishing to hurt any of his countrymen, agreed to do so, on condition that they would not kill him when he was in their hands. "And they bound him with two new cords and brought him up from the rock."

And when Samson came to Lehi, where the Philistines were, they all "shouted against him;" they thought they had surely got him safely now, and that they might do as they liked with him. Some laughed, and some, perhaps, pointed at him with their fingers, and some called him ill names, and all tried to insult him, and, thinking themselves safe, they might have laid aside, or not had ready, what arms they possessed; when, all in a moment, "the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon Samson, and the cords that were upon his arms became as flax that was burnt with fire, and his bands loosed from off his hands."

What a fine fright they were now all in! I think I see them tumbling one over another, and leaving those to save themselves that could; for they could not forget that he lately "smote them hip and thigh with a great slaughter." Samson had no weapon, but he found the new jaw-bone of an ass lying near him, and this he made his sword. He "put forth his hand and took it, and slew a thousand men therewith."

Then, as the conquerors of whom you have before read, Samson made a song of triumph, and he sung,

"With the jaw-bone of an ass, heaps upon heaps,
With the jaw-bone of an ass, have I slain a thousand men."

Samson now threw away the jaw-bone, and in remembrance of the event he called the place Ramath-lehi, which means *the lifting up of the jaw-bone*.

After this battle he was thirsty and ready to die, and he prayed to the Lord to help him, and God clave a hollow place in the place now called by him a *jaw-bone*, and there came water there-





out, and he revived. Then he called that spot after a particular name, that God's goodness to him might not be forgotten; the name he gave to it was Enhakkore, which signifies *the well of him that cried*, that is, *that cried to God*.

Some time after this Samson went to Gaza, a city of the Philistines, and he saw a woman who was an innkeeper, and who does not seem to have been one of the best sort of women. And he remained there for the night. But the Philistines soon learnt that he was come amongst them, and so they resolved once more to try and catch him. So they "compassed him in," by fastening all the gates of the city, and put guards to lie in wait for him in the morning, when they intended to kill him.

However, he got up at midnight, having some divine impression on his mind that warned him of his danger, and he went to the gates of the city, but found them fast. He made no difficulty on that account, but he laid hold on the posts and pulled up posts and gates and all, just as a strong man might a little garden-gate, and away he carried them in triumph on his shoulders, "bar and all," as conquerors sometimes did their spoils, and left them on the top of a hill, that many people might see them.

After this, Samson chose for his companion one Delilah, a Philistine woman whom he loved, and who lived in the valley of Sorek.

The lords of the Philistines, who seem always to have been on the watch for Samson, thought this a good opportunity to take him, so they offered Delilah a sum of money, equal to about three thousand five hundred dollars, if she would find out where his strength was, and so rob him of it; they probably thought he had got some kind of charm to enable him to do such wonders as he did.

Delilah was glad enough to accept of the offer, and she teased Samson to tell her the secret. Samson vexed her in turn, by telling her first one thing and then another, as you may read in the sixteenth chapter, and when she had first bound him with seven green withs, and then again with new ropes, and then wove his locks and fastened them with a pin in the wall, as he told her at different times, he set himself free, and showed that he was as strong as ever.





Then Delilah told him that he mocked her, and that, if he loved her, he would not serve her so. So Samson at length told her all his heart, and said that he was a Nazarite, and his head had never been shaved, but if she cut off his hair he would be as weak as any other man.

Having long hair was the mark of a Nazarite, and if this was cut off the Nazarite's vow would be broken, and God's spirit would depart from him.

Delilah now believed, from Samson's very sincere manner, that he had told her all his heart, and she earnestly begged the lords of the Philistines to come to her and take their captive. So they came, and brought the money in their hand. And she contrived to make Samson fall asleep on her knees, "and she called for a man, and caused him to shave off the seven locks of his head," in which his hair was, probably, plaited; "and she began to afflict him," or insult him, to try if his strength was quite gone. Samson now awoke, and thought he could do as before, but his locks were gone, of which he was not aware, having been asleep, and now "the Lord was departed from him."

Then the Philistines took him, put out his eyes, carried him to Gaza, and bound him with fetters of brass, and made a slave of him, "and he did grind in the prisonhouse;" for they set their slaves to grind their corn.

At length his hair began to grow again. And about that time, "the lords of the Philistines gathered them together for to offer a great sacrifice unto Dagon, their god, and to rejoice, for they said, Our god hath delivered Samson, our enemy, into our hand. And when the people saw him, they praised their god; for they said, Our god hath delivered into our hands our enemy, and the destroyer of our country, which slew many of us."

Then, after the sacrifice, they sent for Samson to make sport for them, probably by ridiculing, and teasing, and smiting him. And that he might be seen by all, they set him in a public part of the building where they were, between two pillars.

Samson then asked a lad that guided him, just to help him to lay hold on the two main pillars that supported the building. "Now, the house was full of men and women, and all the lords





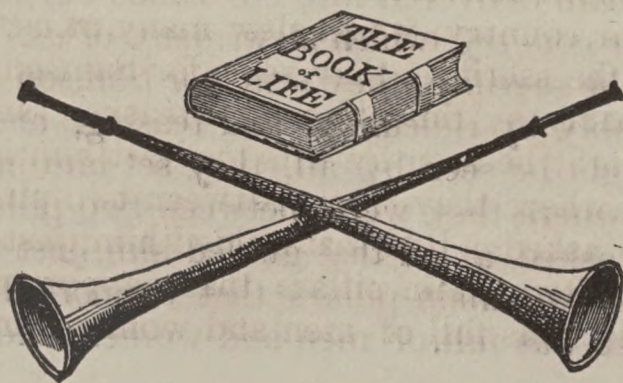
of the Philistines were there; and there were upon the roof about three thousand men and women, that beheld while Samson made sport," the roof being flat, and probably, having openings in it to give a view below.

At this moment Sampson prayed to God to give him strength; then grasping a pillar with each hand, he cried out, "Let me die with the Philistines." "And he bowed himself with all his might, and the house fell upon the lords and upon all the people that were therein."

This was a great blow at the Philistines, for you have just read that all their lords or great men were there; on the roof only, were three thousand persons, besides all that were inside, so that, probably, six or seven thousand were slain in this last effort of Samson. "So the dead which he slew at his death were more than they which he slew in his life."

Then Samson's brethren took him and buried him in the burying place of Manoah his father. "He judged Israel twenty years."

Though we cannot compare the sinning Samson with the sinless Saviour, yet when we read of this conquest at his death, we can but think of Him who, when he died on the cross, amidst the insults of his enemies, destroyed the power of death, so that it could never assail him again, nor shall it ever hurt those that believe in him; who "beat down Satan" under his feet, that he and all his wicked spirits with him, can never harm those that put their trust in Jesus; for he has shown that he is more powerful than they, and having laid down his life, he had even power to take it up again, and now ever lives to save us.





THE SEVENTEENTH AND EIGHTEENTH CHAPTERS OF JUDGES.

The Story of Micah and his Gods.

“Do ye know that there is in these houses an ephod, and teraphim, and a graven image, and a molten image?”—Chap. xviii. 14.

Some chapters are put at the end of the book of Judges, which contain stories of what happened a little after the days of Joshua, and long before Samson, but as they do not relate to the rulers of Israel, they are put here that they might not interrupt their history, by coming between Joshua and the Judges.

In the sixth verse we learn when the story happened, which we are about to tell. “In those days there was no king in Israel, but every man did that which was right in his own eyes.”

“And there was a man of Mount Ephraim whose name was Micah.” And his mother had hoarded up eleven hundred pieces of silver, which she probably meant to leave him when she died. But he, finding where they were, took and laid them up for his own use. Though she were his mother, and though she did not want the money, and he might, yet it was a great fault in him to take it from her. When she missed the money, she was in a great passion, and cursed the thief. Perhaps she suspected Micah, and did so in his hearing that she might terrify him, for it was a dreadful thing for him to hear his mother curse him. So Micah, alarmed at her words, directly told her that he had taken the money, and he restored it, and she then blessed him. “It is best,” says good Matthew Henry, “not to do evil, but it is next best, when it is done, to undo it again by repentance, confession, and restitution. Let children be afraid of having the prayers of their parents against them, ‘for the curse causeless,’” or without cause, “shall not come, yet that which is justly deserved may be justly feared, even though it was passionately and indecently uttered.”

His mother then told him that she had dedicated the money to the Lord for her son's benefit, to make a graven image and a molten image, and she restored the money for that purpose.





However, he gave his mother the money, and she took two hundred shekels of silver, and gave them to the founder, to melt them into the shape of something to be used in worship.

And Micah, her son, had a house of gods, or idols, and he made an ephod, or priest's costly garment, and teraphim, or some sort of household gods, to be consulted by some signs, as gipsies and foolish people consult the grounds of tea in the bottom of a cup, to tell fortunes; and having himself children grown up, he consecrated one of his sons, who became his priest.

Micah, probably, designed to worship the God of Israel, but as it was some trouble to go a great way to the tabernacle, he thought he might save that, by having a priest at home. Now, as this was contrary to God's command, who would have all Israel to worship together, he committed a great fault, and not a less in making his son to serve as a priest.

However, he soon got another priest instead of his son. A young man of Bethlehem Judah, of the family of Judah, who was a Levite, happened to be travelling that way, and stopped at Micah's house, where we may suppose, according to the simple customs of that time and country, he sought a night's lodging and some refreshment. Micah very naturally wished to know who he was, and found that he was a Levite, who had last dwelt at Bethlehem, a city in the tribe of Judah, and that he was seeking some comfortable spot to live in; from which it appears that the nation being then without a king or governor, and so all in disorder, the Levites were not properly provided for as God had commanded by Moses.

So Micah asked him to stop and live with him, and be to him as a father and a priest, and, said he, "I will give thee ten shekels of silver," about thirty shillings, "by the year, and a suit of apparel, and thy victuals." In asking him to be his father, he meant that he might advise with him and respect him as a father; and as a priest, that he should perform all his rites of religion; and though the wages seem small, they were good for that country, in those early times.

So the Levite was satisfied, and Micah consecrated him, or filled his hand with sacrifices to offer for him,—and the young man became his priest, and was in the house of Micah.





This was all doing what was wrong. Micah had no power given him to consecrate a priest, and so he did it without God's command; and though the priests were of the tribe of Levi, yet every Levite was not a priest, but only such as were of the family of Aaron. However, Micah thought himself very happy, because he had got hold of a Levite to worship in his house, and he said, "Now I know that the Lord will do me good, seeing I have a Levite to my priest."

The tribe of Dan finding themselves straitened for room, sent out five men to spy out the land, and see if they could discover a good spot. They, like the Levite, happened to stop at Micah's house. And they happened also to know the voice of the Levite, and asked him how he got there; and when they heard his story, they asked him to act as their priest, and to inquire of God whether they should succeed in their journey. He said they would, and, as it happened, he told them right.

Well, they went on to Laish, about an hundred and four miles further, and there they saw the people living very carelessly, quite at ease, and not on their guard against any attack.

So they went back and told their brethren, and six hundred armed men joined them, and they set out on their march.

In their way they had, as the five men, to pass by Micah's house, and being told about the priest and all his things for worship, they got the five men to go in and steal them; and they secured the priest, and told him it would be much more honourable for him to be priest for so many, rather than for Micah's family. So he very readily went with them, and ran away from poor Micah.

As soon as Micah found what they had done, he got his neighbours together; and they set off after the Danites, and overtook them. "What aileth thee?" said they; that is, "What is the matter?" "Matter," said Micah, "ye have taken away my gods which I have made, and the priest, and ye are gone away; and what have I more?" But they told him he had better go back lest he should get the worst of it; and finding they were much too numerous for him, he was obliged to lose his priest and his gods.

What a foolish man he was to call those gods which he himself had made. And how one sin leads to another; he meant at first





to worship the one true God of Israel by these things, but at length his first error in setting up his own tabernacle, while God had another, led to this disgraceful idolatry, which ended in his shame and confusion. It is they only that trust in the Lord God of Israel, that shall never be ashamed nor confounded.

Then the men of Dan went and took Laish, and killed its idle inhabitants, and burnt the place, and built a city and called it Dan. And there they set up Micah's graven images, and Jonathan the son of Gershom, the son of Manasseh, who had been Micah's priest, became theirs, he and his sons, until the day of the captivity of the land, and they had Micah's image with them "all the time that the house of God was in Shiloh;" which was till the time of Samuel, when the ark of God was carried away captive by the Philistines.

Thus ends the history of Micah's gods, showing how the Danites became guilty of setting up idolatry.

THE NINETEENTH, TWENTIETH, AND TWENTY-FIRST CHAPTERS
OF JUDGES.

"In those days there was no king in Israel; every man did that which was right in his own eyes."—Chap. xxi. 25.

These chapters contain but shocking accounts of human nature. They tell us how the Benjamites so ill-treated the wife of a traveller, whom as a traveller they ought to have used kindly,—that she died in consequence of their cruelty.

The other tribes of Israel were, however, greatly enraged at this conduct; and, having asked counsel of God about going to battle, they nearly destroyed the whole of the tribe of Benjamin, six hundred only having escaped and hid themselves in a rock called Rimmon. Many thousands perished on both sides, owing to this single act of wickedness. Beware of one sin, my dear young reader, for it will probably bring with it many sorrows, and may be the cause of the greatest evils, both to yourself and others.

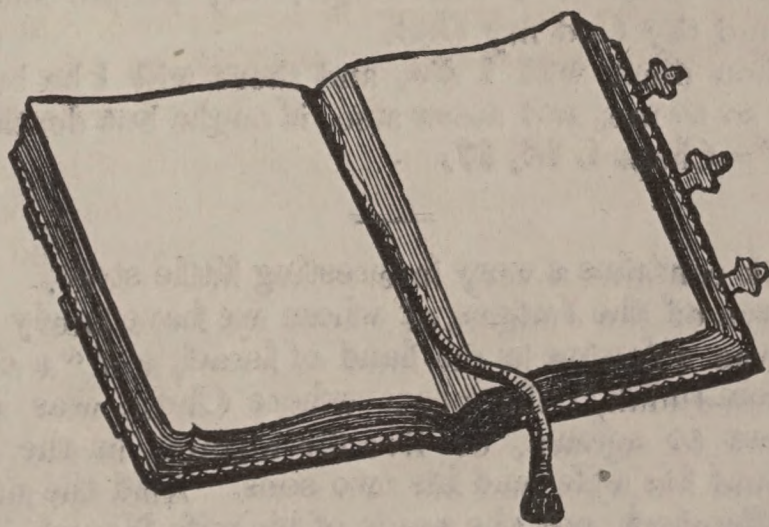
The Israelites grieved that they had now one tribe in Israel





nearly destroyed, and having offered burnt-offerings and peace-offerings to the Lord, on account of their own sins and those of their brethren,—they received them into their favour, and found them wives, that they might comfort them in their distressing condition, having, in their vengeance, slain all the wives and daughters of the tribe of Benjamin.

All this happened when “there was no king in Israel.” Only wicked men would be pleased were there no magistrates, for then every one might injure his neighbour as much as he liked ; and, presuming on this, the Benjamites both injured the innocent and refused to give up the guilty to punishment. And though they were punished, yet the severity was greater than the crime, and was inflicted on thousands for the crimes of a few—men only being the judges according to their own will ; though in the matter of the battle, they did ask counsel of God. Let us, then, thank God that we live where we are protected from the wicked by good laws, and where we may lead peaceable and quiet lives in all godliness and honesty.





RUTH.

THE FIRST, SECOND, THIRD, AND FOURTH CHAPTERS OF RUTH, BEING
THE WHOLE OF THAT BOOK.

The History of Naomi and Ruth.

- “And Ruth said, Intreat me not to leave thee, or return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God.
- “Where thou diest will I die, and there will I be buried: the Lord do so to me, and more also, if ought but death part thee and me.”—Chap. i. 16, 17.
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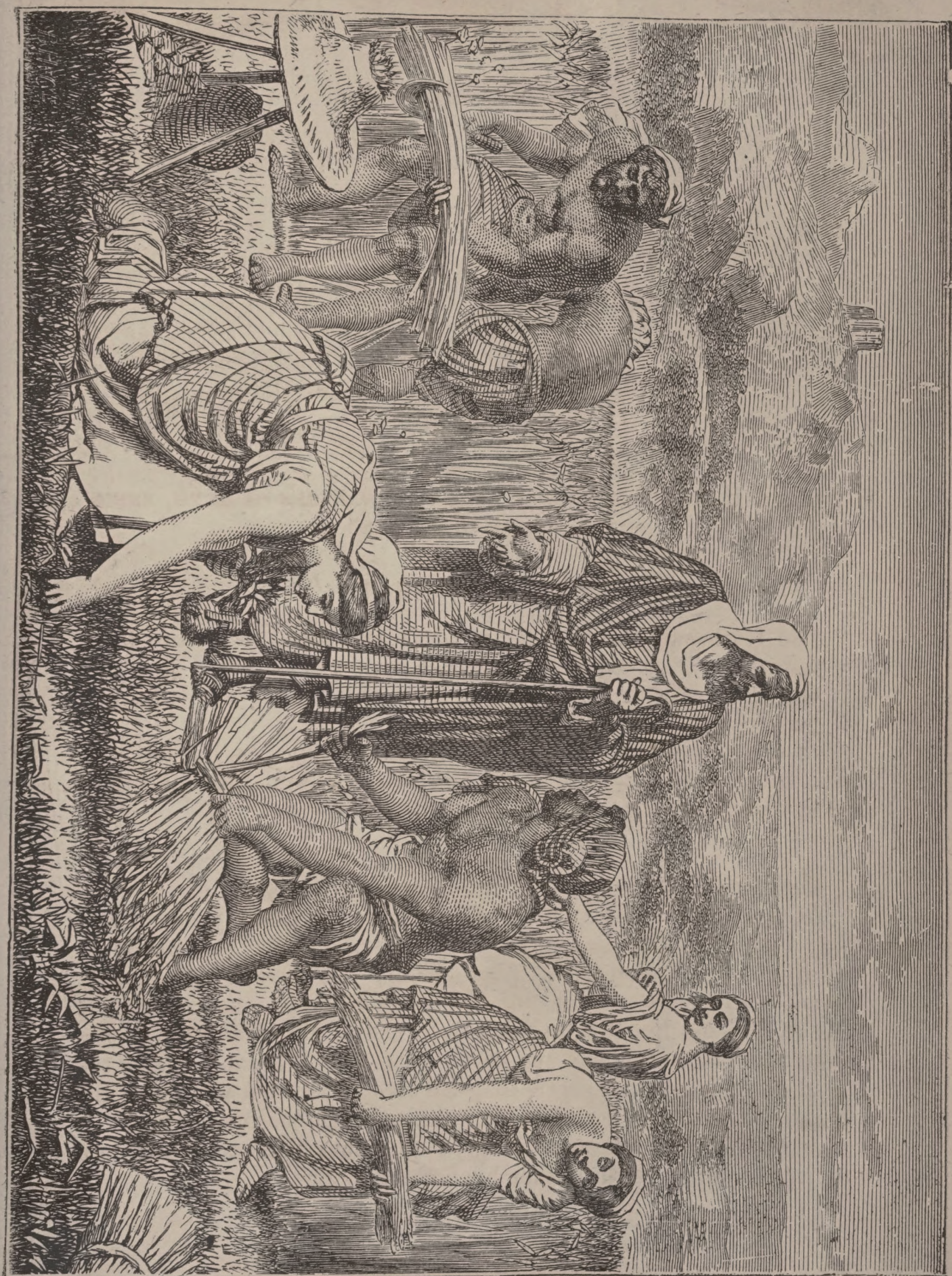
THIS book contains a very interesting little story.

In the days of the Judges, of whom we have lately been reading, there was a famine in the land of Israel, and “a certain man of Bethlehem-Judah,” the place where Christ was afterwards born, “went to sojourn, or live for a time, in the country of Moab, he, and his wife, and his two sons. And the name of the man was Elimelech, and the name of his wife Naomi. There the man died, and his two sons married two Moabitish women, “the name of the one was Orpah, and the name of the other Ruth.”

In about ten years the two sons died also, so Naomi was in a strange country with neither husband nor sons.



RUTH GLEANING IN THE FIELD





NAOMI AND HER DAUGHTER-IN-LAW



HANNAH DEDICATES SAMUEL



She, no doubt, longed to return home, for the people among whom she lived did not serve God, and she, who was an Israelitish woman, could not feel happy among them.

Having learnt that there was bread enough in her own land, she set out to see it once more; and her daughters-in-law, that is, her sons' wives, went with her.

On the way, she advised her two daughters-in-law to go back to their own country and friends; and she kissed them to bid them good bye, and they all wept together. "And Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clave unto her." Then Naomi said to Ruth, "Behold, thy sister-in-law is gone back unto her people, and unto her gods: return thou after thy sister-in-law." Then Ruth told her that she had fully made up her mind, and it was of no use to try and persuade her to turn back. "Thy people," said she, "shall be my people, and thy God, my God;" "I will have no more to do with the heathen in my own country, nor will I serve any more the false gods of Moab."

So they went together to Bethlehem, "in the beginning of barley-harvest."

On Naomi's reaching Bethlehem, many did not know her; she was so altered by time and sorrow,—for time changes the fine bloom on the face, just as autumn does the colours of the summer flowers,—and the deaths of her husband and sons had marked her countenance with lines like those of age, for sorrow brings many down near to the grave, or sends them there.—"And they said, Is this Naomi? And she said unto them, Call me not Naomi, call me Mara; for the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me. I went out full, and the Lord hath brought me home again empty;"—"I went out with a husband and two sons, and something to buy bread, but now I am a widow, and childless, and poor; my name Naomi, which means beautiful, does not suit me, for my face is wrinkled with grief; call me, therefore, by another name—call me Mara, which means *bitterness*, for I am now a woman of a *sorrowful spirit*."

Well, now they had arrived at home they must have bread. So Ruth proposed to go and work in the field, and glean some corn with the poor. And Providence so ordered it, that she





went into a field which belonged to Boaz, a relation of Naomi's husband, and a very rich man.

And Boaz found that she was there, and having heard about her, how good she was to her mother-in-law, and how sincerely she loved the true God, so as even to forsake every thing to serve him; he ordered that nobody should disturb her, that she might eat and drink with his servants; and that she might be the better supplied, he commanded the corn even to be dropped, on purpose, by the way, for her to glean it.

You may read in the second chapter, that Ruth's meal was bread dipped in vinegar, and parched corn. You, perhaps, think this an odd sort of meal, but it is still eaten in that part of the world, and, in hot weather, it is very refreshing to the mouth, and very nice.

Having finished gleaning, Ruth went home with her load, which "was about an ephah of barley," or a bushel. And so she continued gleaning till the end of barley-harvest.

Now, it was a custom in Israel for the nearest relation of a deceased person to marry his widow, if the husband died and left no sons and daughters. And Ruth being the widow of one of Elimelech's sons, her mother told her to make known to Boaz, who was Elimelech's relation, that he must marry her according to the law. We have no such law, and no such custom here, and therefore it would be quite improper among us to do as Ruth did, but Boaz knew that she was acting rightly, and did not condemn her.

There was, however, another relation of her late husband's, who was nearer to him than Boaz; and Boaz said he would see if he would marry her, and recover the property of the family; and if he would not, then he would do as the *law commanded*.

So the matter was settled before ten of the elders, or aged chief men of the city, and the kinsman not being inclined to take Ruth, "he drew off his shoe," which was a custom to show that all claim to any one in such a case was given up, and so she became the wife of Boaz, and made Naomi very happy.

This little history will teach us that good people, like Naomi, may be very much afflicted for a time, yet God in the end will





comfort them : that God can, by his grace, bring the worst sinners to love and serve him, as he did Ruth, a Moabitish woman, one of the people of that nation whose king tried to curse Israel : and, that none shall ever lose that give up anything dear to them in order to serve God, as Ruth even did all her family and friends, and became at last the wife of a rich man and a pious Israelite, who loved her. But the greatest event in the story, and the reason why it is told, is, that it contains something of consequence about Jesus Christ. For Ruth had a son, and they called his name Obed ; he was the father of Jesse, and Jesse was the father of David, and Jesus Christ was called the son of David, according to the flesh. So he could be traced back in this history as springing from Ruth—from Ruth, who was once a heathen woman, and from Boaz, a pious Jew ; showing us, who were then heathen people, that he is the Saviour of the Gentiles, or heathen, as well as the Jews. Thus, by leaving her wicked people, and not going back with Orpah, and resolving on living with Naomi among the true worshippers of God, Ruth had the honour of being one of the line from which should spring that glorious Saviour, in whom all nations should be blessed.





THE FIRST BOOK OF SAMUEL,

OTHERWISE CALLED

THE FIRST BOOK OF KINGS:

OR, THE HISTORY OF THE TIMES OF SAMUEL, IN CONTINUATION OF THE JUDGES: AND OF
THE FIRST KINGS OF ISRAEL, IN COMMENCEMENT OF THE BOOKS OF KINGS.

Young Samuel, a servant of God—Eli's wicked sons.

“And the child Samuel ministered unto the Lord before Eli.”—
Chap. iii. 1.

THERE was a man of a place in Mount Ephraim, whose name was Elkanah. And, as we have before seen, it was common in that country to have more wives than one, and so Elkanah had two wives, called Hannah and Peninnah. We have also seen, that as every family expected the foretold Saviour to be born in it, all were anxious for the honour and happiness of having Christ a member of their household. But Hannah was not a mother, and her heart was therefore grieved. Peninnah, too, was unkind to her; and instead of pitying, she vexed her and provoked her, perhaps, telling her that she would never see the Messiah, or Saviour, springing from her blood.





SHE MADE HASTE TO FLEE.



"SPEAK, LORD, FOR THY SERVANT HEARETH."



What troubles soever befall us, there is no one to whom we can go with a surer hope of support under them, and deliverance from them, than to a good God, who will not torture and upbraid us, but is full of mercy and compassion. Elkanah was, indeed, kind to Hannah, "for he loved her;" and when he had feasts, from that share of the peace-offerings that fell to him, when he presented them to God yearly at Shiloh, he always gave Hannah "a worthy portion" of the meat. But Elkanah could not comfort her when God could. So she prayed silently to the Lord, and vowed, that if she should ever have a son, he should be given up for the entire service of God. And while she was praying, Eli the priest, who "sat by a post of the temple of the Lord," saw her moving her lips and looking much grieved, and he thought that she was not sober. But he did not know her heart; he therefore reproved her; but when she told him she was praying in her sorrow,—pouring out her soul before the Lord; then Eli pitied her too, and prayed God to hear her prayer. And so she went away "no more sad."

After a time, she had a son to bless her family, and she called his name Samuel, which means, "asked of God."

And when she had weaned Samuel, she took him up with her to Shiloh, with bullocks, flour, and wine, as sacrifices to offer to the Lord, and by these sacrifices "to seek God's acceptance of her living sacrifice," which Samuel was, whom she now parted with, from her bosom, to serve God always in his house. You have been told that these sacrifices were shadows of Christ, the great sacrifice offered up for our sins; and this act of Hannah shows us that whatever we do for God, or give up to him, how dear soever it may be to us, has no merit in itself, and can only be well pleasing to God, as we present it to him through Jesus Christ our great sacrifice, with whom God is *well pleased*.

Hannah then prayed and sang a song of thanksgiving to God; and Samuel was left to "minister unto the Lord before Eli, the priest."

This priest had sons, but they were "sons of Belial;" that is, wicked men, sons of the wicked one. As their father was high





priest and judge in Israel, they were priests by birth ; but they were bad priests. God had provided for them a portion of the sacrifices, but instead of being contented with it, they took what did not belong to them, and were so covetous after the best, that the people that went to sacrifice were quite disgusted with them, and prevented from giving what sacrifices they wished to the Lord. We shall hear more of these wicked sons by and by, and of their sad end ; for it is an awful thing to sin against God, who will surely at one time or other, punish all wickedness, unless it be sincerely and deeply repented of, and atonement made for transgression, which is now to be done by looking unto Jesus, the sinner's only hope.

And now Samuel, though young, "ministered before the Lord." "Some little services, perhaps, he was employed in about the altar, though much under the age appointed by the law for the Levite's ministration. He could light a candle, or hold a dish, or run on an errand, or shut a door ; and, because he did this with a pious disposition of mind, it is called *ministering to the Lord*, and great notice is taken of it. After a while he did his work so well, that Eli appointed he should minister with a *linen ephod*, as the priests did,—though he was no priest,—because he saw that God was with him." This may remind us, by the way, that little children cannot begin too soon to be religious.

"Samuel, the child, was wean'd and brought
To wait upon the Lord ;
Young Timothy betimes was taught
To know his holy word.

"Then why should I so long delay
What others learn'd so soon ;
I would not pass another day
Without this work begun."

And Samuel's kind "mother made him a little coat, and brought it to him from year to year, when she came up with her





husband to offer the yearly sacrifice." This was, perhaps, intended to keep him from the cold, and to preserve his other clothes from being soiled, when he was doing some meaner services in the Tabernacle. Children should love their tender mothers, who do not forget them, but are thus thoughtful of their wants, and provide for them.

And now we learn something more about Eli's wicked sons; there was hardly a wicked deed which they did not commit. And Eli, their father, talked with them, and tried to persuade them to turn from their wicked ways, but they did not mind what he said to them. So while "the child Samuel grew up and was in favour, both with the Lord, and also with men;" these sons were quite the contrary, neither beloved by the one nor the other.

Though Eli had told his sons how wrongly they were doing, he was not angry enough with them, for when we are angry at sin, we may be angry and sin not. So God sent a prophet to Eli, to tell him that he knew all the iniquity of his family, and that, instead of the honour of the sacred priesthood continuing in it, he would cut off its branches, who perhaps were just like these sons, and they should die in the flower of their age, just when, like a fine flower, they were rosy and full of health. His two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, should die in one day, and those that remained of the family should be so degraded and poor—that they should crouch to that priest God should place in their stead, and pray for a piece of silver, or a morsel of bread.

God also told Samuel what he would do to Eli's wicked family. You may read, in the third chapter, how God called to Samuel when he had "laid down to sleep," and that Samuel supposed it was Eli speaking to him, and ran to the old man to know what he wanted,—and that he did so three times, till at last Eli saw that God must have said something to him in an extraordinary way, and desired him to say, "Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth," and to listen to all that the voice should speak. Also, that in the morning Eli asked Samuel to tell him all that he had heard; and when he found that it was a message of judgment on his wicked children, he could plead nothing in their be-





half, for God was just in all he meant to do, and he only said, "It is the Lord; let him do what seemeth him good." So Samuel was known and acknowledged to be a prophet of the Lord, and his fame reached from Dan to Beersheba, the two parts of Judea the most distant from each other.





THE FOURTH, FIFTH, SIXTH, AND SEVENTH CHAPTERS OF I. SAMUEL.

The wonderful history of the Ark when taken by the Philistines, and of its restoration to Israel.

“And the ark of the Lord was in the country of the Philistines seven months.”—Chap. vi. 1.

The Israelites were at this time greatly vexed by the Philistines, who had a sort of rule over them, and they resolved to set themselves free. So they went out to meet the Philistines, and were beaten with the loss of four thousand men.

The elders of Israel then advised them to send to Shiloh, and get the ark of the covenant in the camp—as in the days of Moses and Joshua, when its presence gave success, it being then a sign of God's own presence amongst the people. And when the ark had arrived, the Israelites were so rejoiced, and felt so sure that they should beat the enemy, that they shouted till the earth seemed to ring like a bell with the sound of their voices. But God had not told them to fetch the ark, nor had he said he would be with them.

However, when the Philistines knew the ark was there, they were sadly afraid, but instead of answering the purpose which the Israelites intended,—to frighten the Philistines away,—they were only provoked to fight the more desperately, for said they,—“Woe unto us: who shall deliver us out of the hands of these mighty gods? these are the gods that smote the Egyptians with all the plagues in the wilderness. Be strong, and quit yourselves like men, O ye Philistines, that ye be not servants unto the Hebrews, as they have been to you: quit yourselves like men, and fight. And the Philistines fought, and Israel was smitten, and they fled every man into his tent: and there was a very great slaughter; for there fell of Israel thirty thousand footmen;” or, as we should now say, infantry or foot soldiers. “And,” what was worst of all, “the ark of God was taken; and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas,” who had brought the ark, “were slain;” so, as God had said, they died “both in one day.”





As soon as the defeat had happened, a man of the tribe of Benjamin ran off to Shiloh, where Eli was anxiously waiting to hear the news, and especially if the ark of God was safe. And he told the news as he went along, and the people made a great lamentation, and Eli began to fear all was not right. Then the messenger told him that the troops were beaten—and great numbers were slain—and that his two sons were killed—and last of all, that the ark of God was taken. He heard all with silent grief, but when he heard that the ark was taken, his heart sunk within him, and he fell down off his seat, and broke his neck, and died. Eli was ninety-eight years old, and had judged Israel forty years.

So died Eli's sons for their wickedness, and so died Eli, because he had not been earnest enough in rebuking his wicked children. Children must not wonder if their pious parents, with such warnings before them, rebuke them very seriously indeed, if they lie and do other bad things, which God will punish in the guilty. It is love to them which causes their parents to correct them for doing evil, for they know how often it leads to ruin even in this world, and will, if not repented of, lead to eternal misery in another. Besides, if parents are not faithful in warning their children, they also displease God, and may expect to be punished by their wicked children's conduct and sufferings, even if God in the end should have mercy upon themselves.

Nor have we yet heard the whole of this sorrowful tale, for the wife of Phinehas was ill at the time, and on hearing of his death and of the taking of the ark, she died also, leaving a son, whom in memory of these painful events she called Ichabod, which means *The glory is departed*, for "she said, The glory is departed from Israel; for the ark of God is taken."

The Philistines now foolishly thought that they had got the God of the Israelites, and they carried the ark in triumph to Ashdod, one of their five cities, and there they put it in the temple of their idol Dagon, either to worship it themselves, or rather as a trophy of victory. The next morning they found that Dagon





had fallen on his face before the ark, and they set their idol up again. And the next morning after that, they found that he had fallen again, and was so broken that only his stump remained. A pretty sort of a god this! yet so foolish and ignorant are mankind, without the Bible, that they still call such things gods; and the Philistines, who might, in common sense, have seen how foolish it was to worship such a thing, even paid respect, ever after, to the spot where Dagon lost his head and his hands, and would never tread on the threshold of Dagon in Ashdod, on which he fell.



This idol of the Philistines was made like one of our fanciful pictures called a mermaid; the upper part being a human shape to the middle, and the lower like a fish: as Horace, a Roman poet, describes it, "a handsome woman with a fish's tail."

The Philistines would now have done wisely to return the ark, or worship the God of Israel, whose presence was often with it, or who chose to show his power where it was; but they were blind idolaters, and they were punished for hurting Israel, though Israel deserved punishment from God. Having

therefore done that work, they are now punished for their own crimes in slaying the favoured nation, and God sent a disease among them, and destroyed great numbers. Then they sent the ark away to Gath, another of their cities, supposing, perhaps, they should be more lucky there, but there the people died in the same way; and, last of all, they sent it to Ekron; but the people were greatly afraid of it, and they had reason to be so, for there they were smitten like the others, and their cry "went up to heaven;" that is, it was very loud and piteous, and, as we say, rent the air.





After this the Philistines kept the ark no more in their cities, but sent it into the fields, and there God punished them, for there is no escaping from his judgments when he visits the wicked. He caused mice to spring up in great multitudes, and destroy their corn.

So at the end of seven months the Philistines asked their priests and conjurors what they should do with the ark. And they advised that it should be sent away. And as they knew that the God of Israel accepted of trespass-offerings from his people, they thought that one should now be given to him—though they mistook its nature, for without shedding of blood there was no remission of sin; the death of the creatures slain, showing the death of Christ, who was to come and atone for sin. They resolved that this trespass-offering should be in a shape which should acknowledge God's hand in their sufferings, and as they had been smitten with a disease called emerods, they would have five golden emerods made like the shape of a spot marked by the disease, and five would be one for each of their cities; and then as God had sent what was clearly a miraculous number of mice to plague them, they would send of these as many golden ones as they had cities and villages. Then they would take two milch kine or cows that gave milk, and tie the kine to a new cart, and bring the calves home from them; and putting the ark in the cart, with the golden mice and emerods in a coffer or chest by its side, they would let the kine go their way without a driver.

Now in doing this they thought wisely. For they reasoned that if the cows did not go home to their calves, as they are always exceedingly fond of them,—why then they should be sure that something wonderful was about the ark, and that God did all that they suffered; but, if they did go home, then it was all mere chance,—though this last idea was very foolish, because they had seen enough to convince any but the most obstinate that there was no mere chance in what had come upon them.

Well, though the cows had never been trained for the yoke,—and had no driver,—and were left to go their own way,—and had lost their calves, and went on lowing for them,—instead of turn-





ing where they were gone, they took the straight way to Beth-shemesh, the next city in the land of Israel, and though it was eight or ten miles off, they never stopped, and the lords of the Philistines, who watched their motions, saw them cross the border of Beth-shemesh: "And they of Beth-shemesh were reaping their wheat harvest in the valley: and they lifted up their eyes, and saw the ark, and rejoiced to see it. And the cart came into the field of Joshua, a Beth-shemite, and stood there, where there was a great stone: and they clave the wood of the cart, and offered the kine a burnt-offering unto the Lord;" for having carried the sacred ark, they could no more be used for common purposes.

The Philistines saw all this done, and returned.

And now a dreadful punishment befel the men of Beth-shemesh. "Every Israelite had heard great talk of the ark, and had been possessed with a mighty veneration for it: but it was lodged within a veil; and even the high-priest himself might not look upon it but once a-year, and then through a cloud of incense. Perhaps this made many say, (as we are apt to covet that which is forbidden,) what a great deal they would give for a sight of it. Some of these Beth-shemites, we may suppose, for that reason, *rejoiced to see the ark*, more than for the sake of the public safety. Yet this did not content them: they might see its outside, but they would go further; they would take off the covering, which, it is likely, was nailed or screwed on, and look into it; under pretence of seeing whether the Philistines had not taken the two tables out of it, or some way damaged them; but really, to gratify a sinful curiosity of their own, which intruded into those things that God had thought fit to conceal from them." However, they did not treat the ark with that reverence which God ordered it to have, as the sign that he was among the people, and he visited them with severe punishment; for "he smote the men of Beth-shemesh, because they had looked into the ark of the Lord, even he smote of the people fifty thousand and threescore and ten men." Some think that the number is too great for the size of the place, but perhaps the fifty thousand men might be persons drawn from other parts out of curiosity, and the seventy men might be men of Beth-shemesh.





See then with how much reverence we ought to treat the great God of heaven and earth, and at all times to stand in awe of him. We must not use freedoms with his name, and take liberties with his sacred ordinances, as we would with common things; for "God is greatly to be feared in the assemblies of his saints, and to be had in reverence of all them that are round about him." Well might the men of Beth-shemesh say, "Who is able to stand before this holy Lord God?"

The men of Beth-shemesh left the ark on a stone in an open field; and the men of Kirjath-jearim fetched it away, and took it to the house of Abinadab, and sanctified or set apart Eleazar his son to keep it, so that it might not be seized by the Philistines, nor looked into again by curious Israelites. Here the ark remained till it was fetched away many years afterwards, by king David.

No wonder that the ark of God was taken away, and that it was not restored for the use of the people at Shiloh. For with that foolish inclination to idolatry which the wicked nations had around, they had now among them worshippers of idols called Baalim and Ashtarothe. And Samuel told them to put away these idols, and then, and not till then, would God deliver them from the Philistines. So they put them away, and met Samuel at a place called Mizpeh, to worship the Lord.

As soon as the Philistines heard of this, they gathered their troops together, and marched against Israel, and Israel were afraid, and entreated Samuel to pray for them. And Samuel offered a lamb for a burnt-offering,—here was a reference, my dear reader, to the only Lamb that could take away sin, the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ, whom it shadowed forth; and on account of this sacrifice, the Lord heard Samuel.

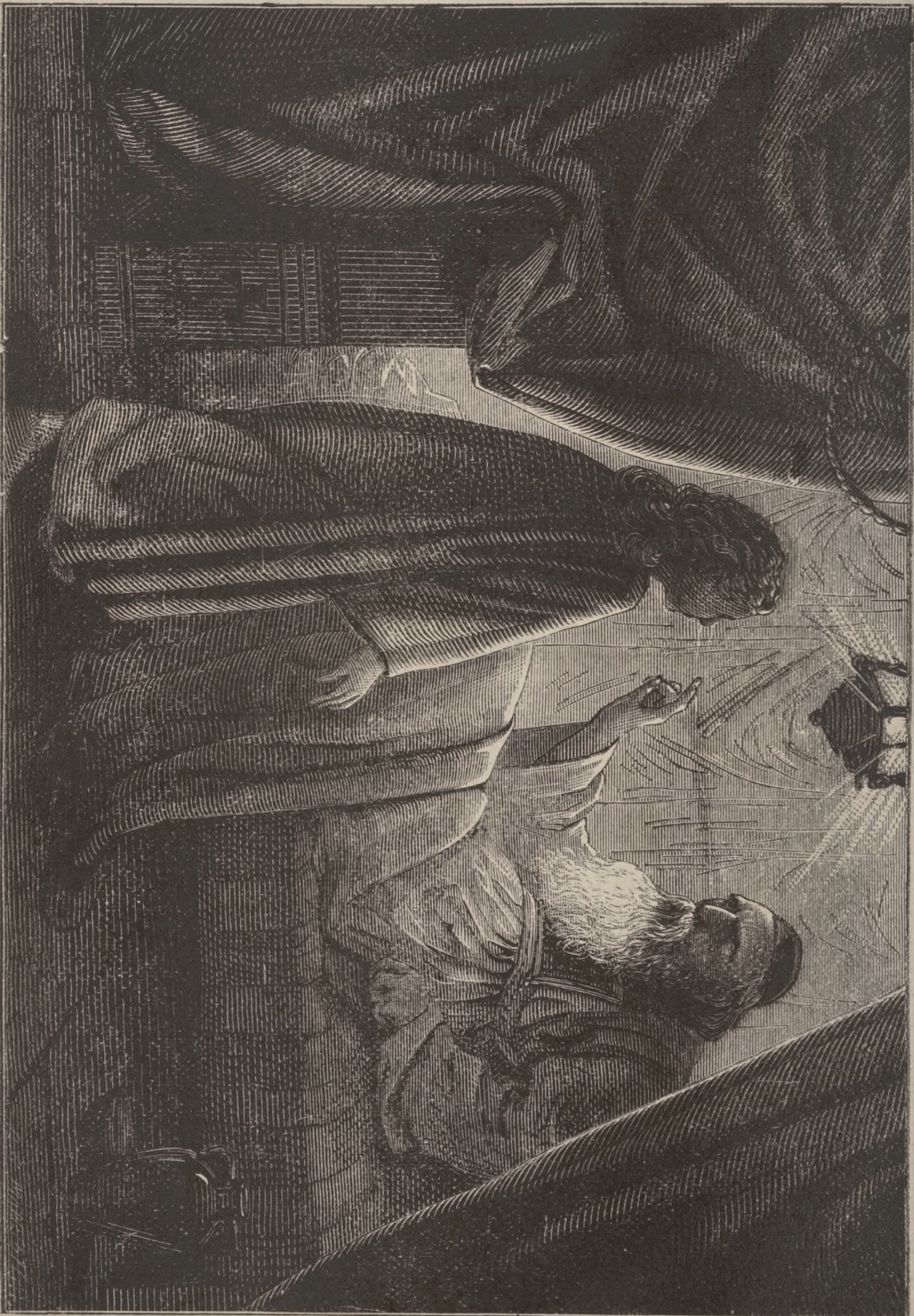
And now, even while the sacrifice was offering up, the Philistines approached, but just as they probably thought they should slay all their victims, "the Lord thundered with a great thunder,"—and they fled in affright, and were smitten before Israel. Josephus, a Jewish writer, says that the earth quaked under them, when first they made their onset, and in many places opened and





N-SNYDER

WOMEN OF ISRAEL MEETING SAUL.



SAMUEL BEFORE ELI.



swallowed them up; and that besides the terror of the thunder, their faces and hands were burnt with lightning, which obliged them to shift for themselves by flight.

To keep up the remembrance of this wonderful deliverance, in which God had so plainly fought for Israel, "Samuel took a stone, and set it between Mizpeh and Shen, and called the name of it, Ebenezer, which means—the stone of help, saying, Hitherto hath the Lord helped us." Thus we erect monuments to keep in memory great events, and sometimes great victories, but the name of God is too often forgotten on our monuments. What Samuel did, we ought often to do; and when we think of the dangers in which God has preserved us, and those out of which he has helped us, and when little children, too, not a few times—our hearts should be as the stone, on which should be written "Eben-ezer," or, hitherto the Lord hath helped us.

This victory kept the Philistines out of the coast of Israel all the days of Samuel, and the cities which had been taken from Israel were now restored to them.

THE EIGHTH, NINTH, AND TENTH CHAPTERS OF I. SAMUEL.

Saul chosen to be the first King of Israel.

"And Samuel said to all the people, See ye him whom the Lord hath chosen, that there is none like him among all the people? And all the people shouted, and said, God save the King!"—Chap. x. 24.

Samuel had two sons whom he made judges, because he began to grow old and unfit for all the cares of his office. But these sons, like those of Eli, turned out bad; they "turned aside after filthy lucre," that is, gain,—they took bribes, and perverted judgment, giving their opinions, in cases of dispute, in favor of those who would pay them best, and not according to right. It was not





Samuel's fault, as it was Eli's, that he did not properly notice their conduct, for he was ready to hear any public complaint against them.

However, the people made the conduct of Samuel's sons an excuse to ask for a king, which they had never had. God designed that they should have one after his own heart, when Samuel should die, but they would not wait till then, and must have one instantly, and so be like the heathen nations around them.

This behaviour displeased Samuel, and he prayed to God for wisdom to direct him what to do. And God told Samuel that they should have a king, but they should feel for their rash choice. Till this time he had been their king, and had appointed them governors who had made them pay no tribute, nor had vexed them by any tyranny ; but now as they had rejected him, by rejecting his servant Samuel, and wanted a king, "like all the nations," they should know what sort of kings theirs were. Not such as govern the people of England, who are a free people, but such as still govern in the eastern parts of the world, who keep all their subjects under them as so many slaves ; what we call absolute monarchs, governed by no law or parliament gathered from the people, but doing every thing according to their own pleasure.

Samuel told the people all this, but they would not mind what he said, and so God said to him, "Hearken unto their voice, and make them a king."

Now there was a man of the tribe of Benjamin, who was rich and mighty, and he had a son, who was a very handsome young man, and so tall that he was a head and shoulders above the height of men in general. The ancient nations usually chose such men for kings ; and this man was suited to the taste of Israel, who seemed more disposed to look for a great man than a good man, to rule over them.

Saul's father, whose name was Kish, being "a mighty man of power," had, it appears, some of the asses of the East, so beautiful and valuable, and which formed a portion of the wealth of Job and other rich men.

By some means these creatures went astray, "And Kish said





to Saul, his son, Take now one of the servants with thee, and arise, go seek the asses."—"It was quite agreeable to the simplicity of those times, for persons of equal or greater substance to be employed in such an affair; asses were ridden upon by persons of quality, and were fed and taken care of by the sons of dukes and princes."

Though Saul was now a man, and had children grown up, yet he obeyed his father's orders; and so he set an example worthy of imitation, for parents are always to be respected.

He travelled through various places, which, it is supposed, took about three days' journey; but he could hear no news of the asses.

Not being able to find them in this time, he determined to return with the servant, to his father, thinking of his father's tender concern for him; supposing "that if they stayed out any longer, the old gentleman would begin to fear, as Jacob concerning Joseph, that an evil beast had devoured them, or some other mischief had befallen them." "Come," said he to the servant, "and let us return, lest my father leave caring for the asses, and take thought for us."—Children should take care that they do nothing to grieve or frighten their parents, but be tender of their tenderness.

Saul's servant, however, recollected that they were now near Ramah, the place where Samuel lived, and so he proposed to go and see this "man of God," and as he was a prophet, perhaps he would be able to tell where the beasts were to be found.

But according to long-established custom, which still continues in the East, great persons were not to be approached by strangers without a present; and as all their provision was gone, what could they present? However, the servant recollected that he had in his pocket a piece of money, "the fourth part of a shekel of silver," which was worth about ninepence of our money; and this, though trifling and hardly worth acceptance, was enough to show respect; so it was agreed that he should make Samuel a present of this piece of money.

And as they went up the hill to the city, they met with some young women going to draw water, and asked them if the *Seer* was there,—for that was the name by which Samuel was known,





known,—Seer meaning nearly the same as prophet, a person who sees or foretels things to come.

Now, Samuel was just then going to sacrifice at Ramah, for the ark not being at Shiloh, divine worship was not now confined to that place. And as they hastened up the hill they met him.

God had impressed on the Seer's mind that he would on that day send a man to him whom he should anoint on the head with oil,—or pour oil on it according to the ancient customs of appointing kings,—and that he should rule over Israel, whose cry of distress, notwithstanding all their ill conduct, he had graciously heard, being oppressed by the Philistines; and this king should deliver them. As soon, therefore, as he saw Saul, he knew that he was the man; and God again impressed it on his mind.

Saul, not knowing Samuel, went up to him, and asked him to direct him to the Seer's house.

Then Samuel told him that he was the Seer, that he was just going to feast at the sacrifice, that he must go up with him and partake of it, and he should return on the morrow; that he need not trouble himself further about the asses, for they were found, and that he should be ruler over Israel.

Samuel's knowledge of his business showed that he was a prophet, but his telling him that he was to be king of Israel, rather surprised him, and he spoke humbly about his being raised to so great an honour.

There were about thirty persons at the feast, and Samuel put Saul "in the chiefest place," and gave him the best dish, already doing him honour as the king appointed by God to rule over Israel.

After the feast Samuel took Saul to the top of his house, which being flat on the roof, was convenient for walking and taking the air, as we would in our gardens; here he communed or talked privately with him, and told him, no doubt, how God had chosen him to be king, that he himself was quite willing to resign the authority of chief to him, and how he ought to perform his office for the good of the people.





The next morning, as Saul was leaving Ramah, Samuel went with him, and when they had reached the end of the city, he told him to send his servant on before, as he had particular business with him.

Then Samuel anointed him, and kissed him, according to the custom of the East.

Before parting with him, Samuel also gave him some signs of what should happen to him as he went on, which must further confirm his faith in him as a true prophet of God. First, he should meet with some who should tell him that the asses were found, and that his father was in trouble at his long absence. Then he should meet with others going to Bethel, where there was a place for the worship of God, to which they would be taking their sacrifices; they should have kids, loaves, and a bottle of wine, designed for sacrifice, meat-offerings, and drink-offerings,—and he and the servant need not fear them, for they would find them to be friends, and they would show their friendship by bidding them good speed, and also giving them two loaves, which they would need in the remaining part of their journey: afterwards they were to come to a high hill, where there was a company or garrison of Philistines, who probably kept the poor Israelites there in subjection to them. There was a school of the prophets, where men were engaged in learning the law of God, and Saul would find himself strongly moved in his mind to join them, as they should meet them coming down from the high place: they would probably have been sacrificing, and they should meet them returning with music, and prophesying or praising God; praising God being one sort of prophesying.

After this Saul was to go to Gilgal, and to wait for Samuel to join him in offering sacrifices to God.

Well, "all these signs came to pass." And when all that knew Saul before, saw him among the company of prophets, they asked each other in wonder, "Is Saul also among the prophets?"

And Samuel called the people together at Mizpeh, and told them, of what great things God had done for them, from time to time, ever since he delivered them out of Egypt; and how ungrateful it was in them to want a king to rule over them;





and then the king was chosen by lot. By the first lot, the tribe of Benjamin was singled out from all the tribes; then the family of Matri, of that tribe to which Saul belonged; and then Saul the son of Kish. And he had modestly hid himself among the stuff, supposed to be the carts and baggage, brought by the people to Mizpeh, and when he was fetched, "he was higher than any of the people, from his shoulders and upwards;" or, as we said before, by his head and shoulders. And when Samuel showed him to the people, they were quite delighted with him; and they all shouted, "God save the king!"

Then Samuel told the people "the manner of the kingdom;" that it was the office of the king to rule justly, and of the people to obey his lawful commands. These things were written in a book, as a kind of agreement between them, which was carefully laid up among the records of the kingdom.

And now, most of the people being sent away by Samuel, went home, except some who attended on Saul, willingly, as a kind of body-guard; and some others who did not like him as king,—perhaps they did not think he was of a family great enough—and so these men of Belial, or wicked men, began to insult him; but in this instance he showed only a good temper, and took no notice of them, but "held his peace."

Thus you have the beginning of the Kings of Israel, whose history we shall now for some time have to read.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER OF I. SAMUEL.

Saul's victory over the Ammonites.

"And it was so on the morrow, that Saul put the people in three companies, and they came into the midst of the host in the morning watch, and slew the Ammonites, until the heat of the day: and it came to pass, that they which remained were scattered, so that two of them were not left together."—Ver. 11.

Saul began his reign by a very brave action. Nahash, who was probably a king of the Ammonites, went and encamped or





sat himself down with his army in tents, round Jabesh-Gilead, a fortified place belonging to the Israelites; near the country of the Ammonites.

So as he was very strong, and the garrison were very weak,—and still weaker in faith, or they would have trusted in God, and tried their force against the enemy—it was proposed to Nahash that they would surrender and be his slaves, if he would tell them on what terms he would spare their lives.

Nahash told them that they must all have their right eyes thrust out. His object in wishing to do this cruel action, was chiefly to cripple the men of Jabesh-Gilead, so that they might not fight any more; for in those times they fought with shields in their left hands, which were held up partly before their left eye; so that if a soldier lost his right eye he was the same as one blind, for any use that he could be of in the field of battle. He was also pleased at the thought of putting the Israelites to pain, and of casting a disgrace upon all the people of Israel, who, he thought, were not inclined to help their distressed brethren.

The men of Jabesh then asked for seven days to settle the matter, and promised that if, at the end of that time, they could get no help, they would surrender.

When the news reached Gibeah, where Saul was, the people, after the Eastern manner, lifted up their voices and wept so loudly, that when Saul, who, after the simple manner of living in those days, came—not from a palace, but from the fields where he had been attending the herds,—he was attracted by their distress, and asked what was the matter. When he was told what Nahash intended to do, the Spirit of God came upon him, and gave him courage and wisdom. “And he took a yoke of oxen and hewed them in pieces, and sent them throughout all the coasts of Israel by the hands of messengers, saying, Whosoever cometh not forth after Saul, and after Samuel, so shall it be done unto his oxen: and the fear of the Lord fell on the people, and they came out with one consent.” By sending the pieces of oxen, Saul gave the people to understand, that if they did not help their brethren, they should be severely punished, and they should be deprived of their principal wealth, which consisted of cattle.





Saul soon collected an army of three hundred and thirty thousand men, and the messengers went back to Jabesh-Gilead to tell the garrison that by the time the sun was hot,—or about the noon of the morrow,—they should have help; and they were glad enough at the news.

Perhaps the time was nearly gone for them to surrender, and their hopes were very low, so that now their joy was greater; and concealing from their foes that they would have help, they merely sent them a message that they would keep their word and be with them at the appointed time:—"To-morrow we will come out unto you, and ye shall do with us all that seemeth good unto you."

Early on the morning of that day in which the Ammonites expected to enjoy their cruel triumph over the people of Jabesh-Gilead, Saul came suddenly upon them with his great army, which he divided into three parts, so that it fell upon the foe in three places at once, and being taken by surprise, they ran away in all directions, and Saul chased them till the heat of the day.

Pleased with Saul's bravery and success, the people now said, "Who is he that said, Shall Saul reign over us? bring the men, that we may put them to death." But Saul very generously forgave those that had insulted him, and said, "There shall not a man be put to death this day; for to-day the Lord hath wrought salvation in Israel."

And now his right to the kingdom was renewed at Gilgal, sacrifices were offered to the Lord, and the day was spent in rejoicing.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER OF I. SAMUEL.

Samuel's farewell address to Israel.

"Only fear the Lord and serve him in truth with all your heart, for consider how great things he hath done for you.

"But if ye shall still do wickedly, ye shall be consumed, both ye and your king."—Vers. 24, 25.

Samuel now grew old; and, as the people had got the king whom they had chosen, he gave up the power which he had held for their good.





And do but observe how boldly this good man could appeal to all Israel for the goodness of his character:—"Behold, here I am : witness against me before the Lord, and before his anointed, whose ox have I taken ?—or whose ass have I taken ?—or whom have I defrauded ?—whom have I oppressed ?—or of whose hand have I received any bribe to blind mine eyes therewith ?—and I will restore it you. And they said, Thou hast not defrauded us, nor oppressed us, neither hast thou taken ought of any man's hand."

Rulers in free countries like England cannot easily oppress those under them ; but in the East, they are great tyrants, and often take away what wealth they please from those who have gained it by industry ; so that those who are rich are sometimes obliged to feign themselves poor, lest their princes should rob them, or, what is still worse, kill them, to get at their money. While all around them, the people of Israel saw these oppressors, it was a very striking appeal which Samuel made to them, in behalf of his good government while he ruled over them ; and it showed that they were a discontented and ungrateful people, that, while God provided such a man to rule them, their foolish pride should desire to have a king, and so to be like the heathen nations in grandeur.

In taking his farewell, as the ruler of Israel, Samuel also reminded them of God's goodness to them and their fathers—of the miseries their fathers had suffered, when they forsook God—of their repentance—of God's gracious regard to them, and his glorious deliverances of them from their enemies, and then, of his even condescending to give them a king, when they so much wished for one. And now, he would also tell them, that under this new government they were still not to think themselves free from the government of God, whom, if they obeyed, they should be happy ; but if they disobeyed, they must be miserable.

Then, to show that what Samuel spoke was true, and by his direction, God, at Samuel's word, sent "thunder and rain," at a time of the year, when, in that country, the like was never known. It was the time of "wheat harvest," which is there about the end of June or beginning of July ; and one who lived there





for several years, says, that at that time he never saw any rain in Judea. So "all the people greatly feared the Lord and Samuel."

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER OF I. SAMUEL.

Saul rejected from being king.

"And Samuel said to Saul, Thou hast done foolishly : thou hast not kept the commandment of the Lord thy God, which he commanded thee : for now would the Lord have established thy kingdom upon Israel for ever.

"But now thy kingdom shall not continue : the Lord hath sought him a man after his own heart, and the Lord hath commanded him to be captain over his people, because thou hast not kept that which the Lord commanded thee."—Vers. 13, 14.

"Saul reigned one year," and then he entered upon the second year of his reign, when he did very foolishly.

He raised an army, much too small to contend with the Philistines, and then his son Jonathan smote a garrison of them that was in Geba ; and it is thought that this was done treacherously, while all the parties were in a state of peace, and resting on each other's word ; for something of the kind is meant by its being said, that "all Israel also was had in abomination with the Philistines." The Philistines vowed vengeance against them for such unfair dealing, and abominated them on account of it.

And now "the Philistines gathered themselves together, to fight with Israel, thirty thousand chariots, and six thousand horsemen, and people, which is as the sand which is on the sea-shore in multitude."

The Israelites now found, that though they had a king, like the heathen, yet he could not give them courage, for never were their hearts so faint. "For the people were distressed ; then the people did hide themselves in caves, and in thickets, and in





rocks, and in high places, and in pits. Some, also, went a great way off, over Jordan, and all those that stayed with Saul "followed him trembling."

Now Samuel had told Saul to go to Gilgal and wait there for him seven days, and he would come and meet him and offer sacrifices for him and the people. So Saul went to Gilgal and waited till the seventh day; but not having patience to wait till the end of the day, as Samuel had not come—he thought that he would not be there at all, and so he called for the sacrifices, and offered them himself. Now this was very wicked, for he was only a king, and neither a priest nor a prophet: so, that in offering sacrifices, he had profaned the most sacred things, and dared to take upon himself the most solemn office without God's command.

Presently came Samuel, according to his promise; and Saul told him that he had waited so long that he began to think he would not come, and he was afraid that the Philistines would fall upon him before the sacrifices were offered up; and so, much against his will, he had turned priest himself. Then Samuel told him how foolishly he had done, and that, for this act of disobedience to God, against which he had had sufficient warning, he should lose his kingdom, and it should go to another man—one after God's own heart, who would not so profane his holy things.

Saul now mustered his army, and found he had no more than six hundred men left with him. A fine army, indeed, for a king! so low was the pride of Israel now brought!

The Philistines, in the mean time, divided themselves into three companies, who went different ways, that they might get provisions and pillage the country.

The few Israelites that followed Saul, were also without swords or spears—they could have nothing else to fight with but clubs or slings, or bows and arrows, made of wood only, which would be poor weapons; for, when the Philistines had before beaten them, they had taken away all their forges to make iron, and their workers in that metal, so that no swords, spears, or arrow-heads, could be made; and the Israelites even went down to the Philistines to sharpen their ploughshares and other instruments, which





they used to till the field. "So it came to pass, in the day of battle, that there was neither sword nor spear found in the hand of any of the people that were with Saul and Jonathan; but with Saul and with Jonathan his son, was there found;" they only had swords.

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER OF I. SAMUEL.

Jonathan's bold attack of the Philistines.

"And Jonathan climbed up upon his hands and upon his feet, and his armour-bearer after him; and they fell before Jonathan, and his armour-bearer slew after him."—Ver. 13.

While the Israelites were in their weak state, the Philistines never attacked them; this can only be accounted for from their hearts being under God's controul, and he withheld them from doing Israel harm. Saul could do nothing, and he and his men pitched quietly under a tree.

Jonathan, Saul's son, was a very brave young man; and God put it into his heart to fall upon the Philistines, having no other helper than his armour-bearer, or the man that carried his spear and shield, that they might not fatigue him, but leave him the more fresh for using them in battle.

So "Jonathan said to the young man that bare his armour, Come, and let us go over to the garrison of these uncircumcised: it may be that the Lord will work for us: for there is no restraint to the Lord, to save by many or by few. And his armour-bearer said unto him, Do all that is in thine heart: turn thee, behold, I am with thee according to thy heart."

Then Jonathan gave a sign to the armour-bearer, by which he might know if it was wise to attack the Philistines.

When the Philistines saw Jonathan, they probably laughed at him, and they said, "Come up to us and we will show you a thing." Perhaps they thought that Jonathan would not dare to





venture, and so they mocked him. Now these words were the sign which Jonathan had looked for; and by speaking so, the Philistines showed that they did not care for the Israelites, and seemed to make sure of beating them. Jonathan boldly accepted of the challenge, and climbed up the steep rock on which the fort was built, where the Philistine garrison was, followed by his armour-bearer. Perhaps the Philistines did not think he could do so, and he might suddenly have come upon them, springing from under the top of the rock before they thought of any danger,—and when they saw him followed by another, they might fancy, at the moment, that they were taken by surprise by the whole army. God, too, who had prompted Jonathan to what he did, and gave him and his armour-bearer courage, made the Philistines become cowards, for “they fell before Jonathan;” who, most likely, knocked them down, “and his armour-bearer slew after him.” So Jonathan and his armour-bearer slew about twenty men in a small space of ground, which a couple of oxen might plough over in a day.

The news of the destruction of this little garrison was immediately carried to the army: and God so ordered it, that they and all the people became cowards too, and were, what we call, in such a case, panic-struck.

Some of Saul's men were on the look-out, to see that the Philistines did not surprise him; and they saw a great movement among their armies, “and behold, the multitude melted away,” grew less and less, like snow melted by the sun, “and they went on beating one another.” The fright of the Philistines had gone from the garrison to the camp; the men had run away, and either in clearing a way to escape, or—by mistake, likely to be made in a fright—taking their own troops for Israelites, who, they might suppose, had got in in disguise amongst them, they drew their swords upon each other, and so made terrible havoc in their armies.

Saul, seeing this, wondered which of his regiments had gone out to battle, and called a muster to examine them, when no men were missing but Jonathan and his armour-bearer.

Saul was now about to consult the priest what he was to do,





but the confusion among the Philistines having increased, he thought there was no time to lose, and so he and all his men went to the battle, where they found the Philistines fighting one another; and the Hebrews, or Israelites, who had been kept prisoners in the country of the Philistines, took the opportunity to get free, and joined the armies of their countrymen, and all those who had hid themselves, now took courage and came to the battle. "So the Lord saved Israel that day."

Saul now resolved to pursue his enemies; and he pronounced a curse against any of his soldiers who should eat food till the evening; for he thought, that whilst they stopped to eat, the enemy would escape. This was not wise, for they would have been all the stronger to pursue them. However, the people obeyed, and none of them tasted any food.

Jonathan was, of course, quite ignorant of what his father had commanded, as when he gave the command, he himself was fighting against the Philistines. So when he came to a wood, where there was much wild honey in the hollow trees and rocks, in which the bees had put it, as they do with us in hives—seeing some of it running on the ground, having burst the comb, as it sometimes will, with the hot weather—he thought he would just taste it. He had no time to stop, but having a rod, or long stick, in his hand, he dipped the end of it into the honey, and when he had eaten it, his eyes, which had grown dim from fatigue, became quite refreshed, and "were enlightened," or brightened up.

One of the people now told Jonathan what his father had commanded; and he was very sorry that he had given such an order, for he said if the people had been allowed to eat freely, there would have been a much greater slaughter of the Philistines, instead of which they had become weak, and not able to pursue the enemy, for want of food.

And now another evil grew out of Saul's rash command; for as soon as the people durst eat, they flew upon their food like hungry wild beasts, and would not even wait for it to be dressed, but contrary to the express command of God, they ate it, brute like, while it was yet warm and bleeding.

Saul was to blame for this, but he blamed the people, and said,





"Ye have transgressed." When people do a wrong thing, how ready they often are to lay the fault upon others. I fear my young readers have sometimes been guilty of so doing. To prevent the people eating any more creatures with their warm blood, Saul desired a great stone to be rolled before him, and the cattle to be killed in his presence, so he would see that it should be properly eaten. This stone was probably turned into an altar, for "Saul built an altar unto the Lord: the same was the first altar that he built unto the Lord."

Saul now proposed to renew the pursuit of the Philistines, and to go after them all night; but the priest advised him to ask counsel of God, and the answer was, not that day. Saul, then, probably supposing that the answer was given as a sign of something having been done wrong, and guessing that his law against eating had been broken, appealed to God by solemnly casting lots, and the lot fell upon Jonathan. Poor Jonathan intimated that it was indeed a very hard case, that for tasting a little bit of honey, fatigued as he was with fighting, he should be doomed to die, but Saul said, "Thou shalt surely die, Jonathan." But Jonathan had not broken God's law, and God had shown him great honour, in that he had wrought or worked with God in destroying the enemies of Israel that day, and so the people pleaded for him, and they said that not a hair of his head should be hurt; and we may suppose that Saul, when he was a little come to himself, and out of his passion, was very well pleased that he had been saved from killing so brave a son. "So the people rescued Jonathan that he died not."

The rest of the chapter tells us of what further Saul did against the enemies of Israel, and the names of his sons and daughters, and other persons connected with him, and his policy in recruiting his army by getting all the strong and brave men into it, wherever he could find them.





THE FIFTEENTH CHAPTER OF I. SAMUEL.

The Amalekites destroyed.

"Go and utterly destroy the sinners, the Amalekites, and fight against them until they be consumed."—Ver. 18.

In this chapter we learn that God sent Samuel to Saul, with a command to go and destroy the people of Amalek, and to spare nothing that belonged to them; even little infants and sucklings, and every kind of beast.

This sentence was very severe, but God never punishes without a cause, and Samuel gave the reason for it; "Thus saith the Lord of hosts, I remember that which Amalek did to Israel, how he laid wait for him in the way, when he came up from Egypt."

We have the particular account of what the Amalekites did in the twenty-sixth chapter of Deuteronomy, and the seventeenth and eighteenth verses,—how, when the Israelites were faint and weary, they fell upon the people and smote the hindmost of them; and God then purposed that he would blot out that wicked nation from the face of the earth, as we blot out any word with ink that is written in a book,—and that this should be done when Israel had got rest from their enemies round about,—and though now it was four hundred years since their offence, God performed his word. God does not forget sin if we do, and he will remember sooner or later, and punish it most severely, except we repent and seek for pardon. These Amalekites were, indeed, not the same as those that had at first injured Israel, but no doubt they had the same spirit of enmity towards them, and towards their God, and therefore God visited them at last with a sore destruction. "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."

Saul did not, however, slay the Kenites who dwelt among the people of Amalek, for they had not partaken of their sins. Jethro, the father-in-law of Moses was one of the Kenites.





And now, as God's executioner of a set of vile criminals, "Saul smote the Amalekites," but he did not do all his work as God had commanded, for he spared Agag, perhaps because he was a great man; and he thought it a pity that all the fine cattle should be slain, and so he killed only the worst, and kept the best.

Now, it is very wicked to do just as much of God's commands as we please, and leave the rest undone. So did Saul, and God was displeased with him. And God said, "It repenteth me that I have set up Saul to be king," meaning that he would now act as men did when they repent and alter what they purposed,— "for he is turned back from following me, and hath not performed my commandments."

So Samuel went to Saul, and asked how he came to keep the sheep and oxen. And Saul, to excuse himself, said that "the people spared" them, and that they were only preserved to offer to God. These were poor excuses, which Samuel knew were not true, for the people would not have dared to spare the beasts, if Saul had not told them to do so,—and he had probably not kept them to sacrifice, but for his own use: but if it were so, "to obey is better than sacrifice," and God would have been satisfied at his doing his commands, but could not be so at his choosing to act after his own fancy. So Samuel said, "Because thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, he hath also rejected thee from being king."

On learning God's displeasure, Saul began to confess that he had done wrongly, and owned that he had feared the people, when he ought to have feared God only, though still it is thought he only made the people's will an excuse for his own. And he tried to get Samuel, as God's prophet, to speak pardon to him, but he could not. "And as Samuel turned about to go away, he laid hold upon the skirt of his mantle, and it rent." This, Samuel as a prophet, said, was a sign of what God would certainly do. "And Samuel said unto him, The Lord hath rent the kingdom of Israel from thee this day, and hath given it to a neighbour of thine that is better than thou." And he also told him—what we should always remember when we think on God's words—that he, "the strength of Israel, will not lie nor repent." He had, indeed, just said that he had repented of making him king, but I told you that





this only meant, that by taking away his crown, he would act just as we do when we repent; but God's mind never changes, for he knew beforehand that Saul would do evil and deprive himself of his crown.

Samuel then did what Saul had left undone, and he passed sentence of death on Agag; and you will see that he did so not without a cause, for he had been a very cruel man, and no doubt his people had been as cruel and wicked as he, and so shared justly in his fate. "And Samuel said, As thy sword hath made women childless," or, as thou hast cruelly slain many a beloved child, to the great grief of the heart-broken mother, "so shall thy mother," who perhaps had escaped, "be childless among women;" and herein she too was punished, who had perhaps praised her son for the cruel deeds he had done. "And Samuel hewed Agag in pieces before the Lord in Gilgal."

Thus the Amalekites were destroyed as a nation, though some are afterwards mentioned, who probably escaped from the sword of Saul, and fled out of the kingdom.

THE SIXTEENTH CHAPTER OF I. SAMUEL.

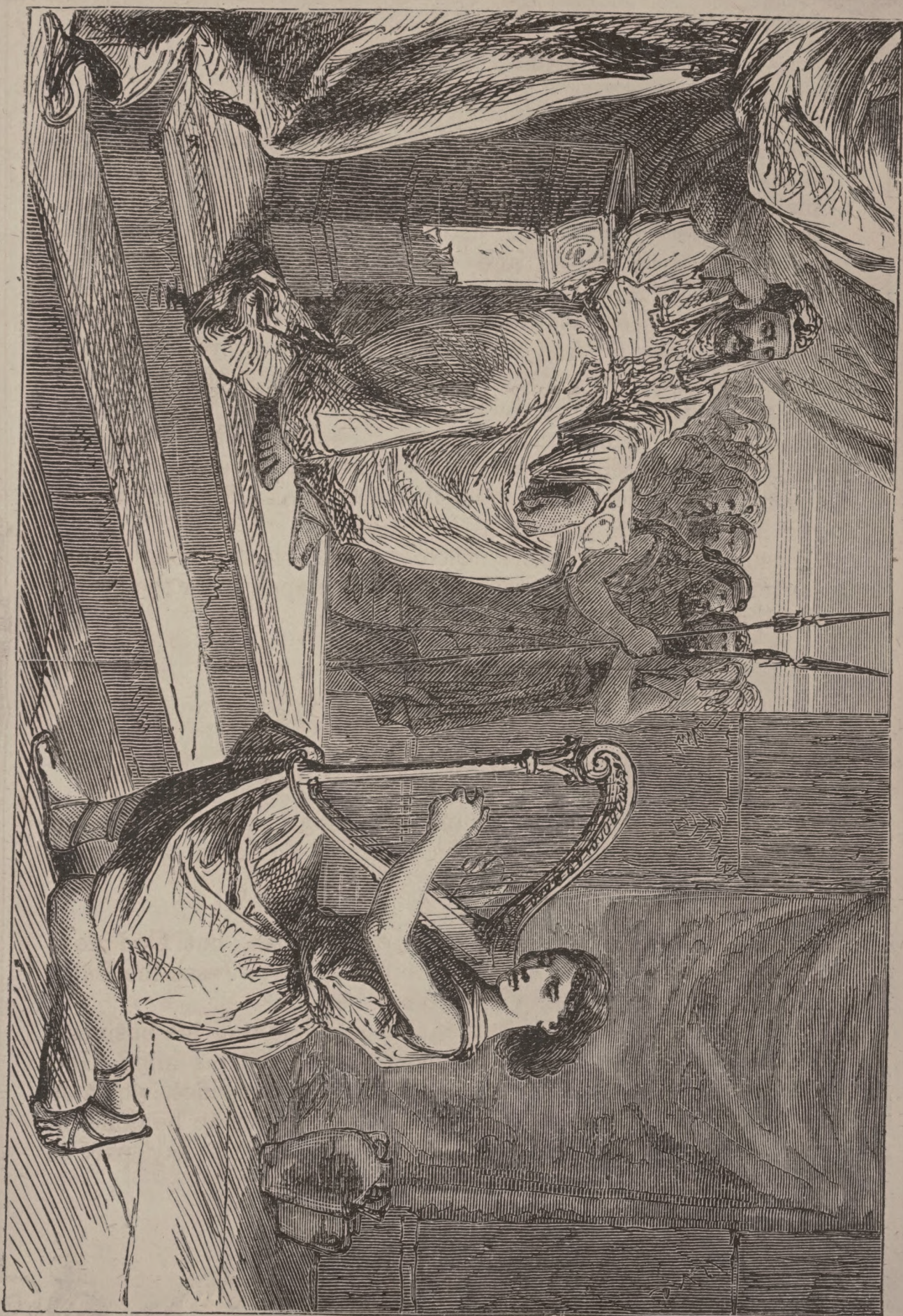
David anointed to be King of Israel.

"Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the midst of his brethren; and the Spirit of the Lord came upon David from that day forward."—Ver. 13

Samuel had retired to live quietly at Ramah, but God now commanded him to take a horn of oil, and go to Jesse the Bethlehemite, and anoint one of his sons to be king.

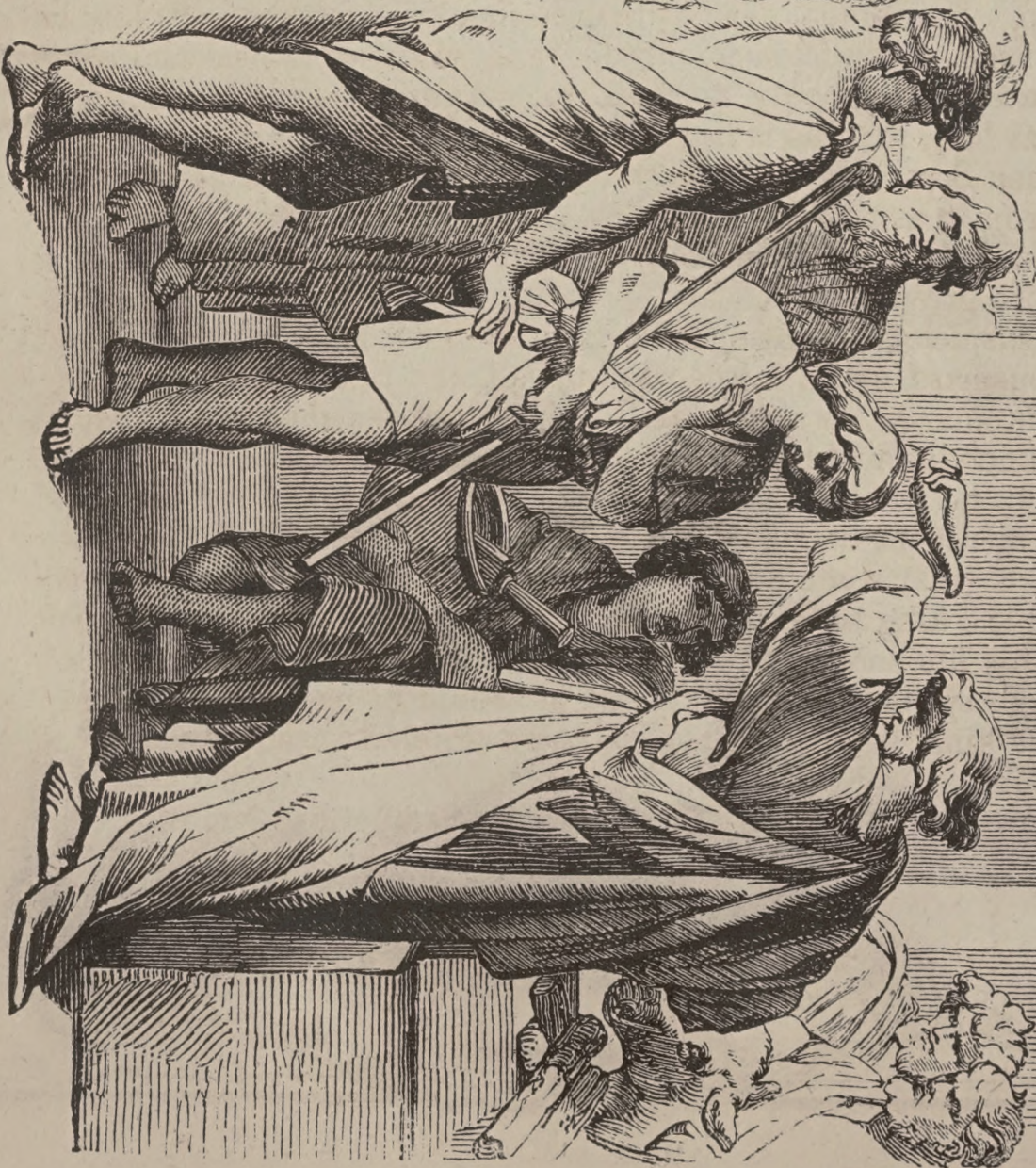
But Samuel was afraid that Saul would find out his business, and in revenge slay him. However, to comfort his mind, God ordered him to go to Bethlehem and offer up a sacrifice, which as a priest he could do, and which was very proper to be done on such an occasion, and Saul would not then suspect any part of his business.







DAVID AND GOLIATH.



DAVID ANOINTED KING.



As soon as Samuel had arrived at Bethlehem, the people feared, lest perhaps, as God's prophet, he might have some sentence to denounce against them for some sins which they had done, and they asked him if he came peaceably, and he told them that he came to sacrifice to the Lord. "And he sanctified Jesse and his sons, and called them to the sacrifice."

The first son that made his appearance was called Eliab, and he was handsome and tall, and Samuel thought that he must certainly be the one whom God had chosen to be king, for people then usually preferred a fine tall man for this rank. However, God told Samuel that he did not look at the outward appearance, but at the heart, and that Eliab was not the man whom he had chosen. Then seven of Jesse's sons passed by Samuel, one after another, and there were no more remaining. At last Samuel asked Jesse if he had no other son; and he told him there was another, but he was the youngest, and he was then keeping some sheep. So Samuel desired that he should be fetched. "Now he was ruddy," or fresh-coloured, "and withal of a beautiful countenance, and goodly to look to. And the Lord said, Arise, anoint him, for this is he."

Then Samuel anointed David, and returned to Ramah.

From that time "the Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the Lord troubled him." God permitted him to grow "fretful and peevish, and discontented, timorous and suspicious, starting and trembling." This made him unfit for business, and a burden to himself, and to all around him.

His counsellors seeing his pitiable state, sought to relieve him, and knowing his mind to be distressed, they advised that music should be tried for it. It would have been wiser, had they told him to repent of his sins and pray earnestly to God; but they thought that some amusement was now wanted, and so they advised the king to have a good harp player, and whenever he felt his low fits coming upon him, as soon as he touched the music, the evil spirit would depart and he would be cheerful as others.

The king liked the proposal, and ordered such a musician to be found.

Now David, the son of Jesse, whom Samuel had anointed, was





very skilful in playing the harp, and one of Saul's counsellors told him of it; and though he was little of stature, he was a brave man, and this Saul would also like.

So Saul hearing a good character of him, sent for him. And Jesse sent a few presents with him, in token of respect to king Saul. "And David came to Saul and stood before him, and he loved him greatly, and he became his armour-bearer." And he asked David's father to let him stay in his service. And whenever Saul's evil spirit troubled him, David played his harp; "so Saul was refreshed, and was well, and the evil spirit departed from him."

Music under proper regulations is a very agreeable and innocent recreation, and of great use in cheering and composing the mind. David's music was, however, of a sacred kind, and God made it to touch Saul's soul, that David might find favour at court, and be better fitted for afterwards filling the station of king himself.

THE SEVENTEENTH CHAPTER OF I. SAMUEL.

David's victory over Goliath.

"Therefore David ran, and stood upon the Philistine, and took his sword, and drew it out of the sheath thereof, and slew him, and cut off his head therewith. And when the Philistines saw their champion was dead, they fled."—Ver. 51.

We have here the story of David's battle with the great giant, Goliath of Gath.

The Israelites and the Philistines were constantly at war, and here we find them opposed to each other, having drawn up their armies on two hills with a valley between; so that they were near enough to call to each other, though they must go down into the valley, or both stand on one or other of the hills to meet in battle.

The Philistines were full of courage, for they had a terrible giant amongst them, whose name I have just mentioned. He was the champion of his people,—that is, one ready to defy any man





who dared to meet him in battle, and whom he could crush with as much ease as any man could crush an infant. Some suppose that he was twelve feet high, which is as tall again as one of our tallest men, but others think it more probable that he was about ten feet, and this is the lowest estimate that is made, which would make him nearly twice the height of most of the people we may meet in going along a street.

He was not only very tall, but also very strong and well armed. He had a large brass helmet on his head, and was dressed in a coat of mail, which was like a jacket or shirt of brass, fastened together in small pieces, like the scales on a fish or the tiles on the roof of a house. Some of this sort of armour is to be seen in **European museums**.

He had also greaves of brass upon his legs, and a target of brass between his shoulders. These greaves were a kind of brass boots which, however, only covered the front of the leg from the knee to the instep, so that the whole shin was protected by them; the target was something of a covering to protect his neck and shoulders. "The staff of his spear was like a weaver's beam," so that he could easily play, as with a sword, with a huge piece of wood which another man could scarcely lift. "And his spear's head weighed six hundred shekels of iron," which is thought to be above eighteen pounds. The whole armour which this giant carried about him with ease, must have weighed about two hundred and seventy-two pounds, which was more than four times as much as that of the best armed soldiers of ancient times. He had, as others, an armour-bearer to carry his shield.

This strong and terrible man came forward from the Philistine army, and called to the Israelites to tell them, that if they could send a man against him to beat him, the Philistines should be their servants, but if not, they should serve the Philistines. He thought, to be sure, that nobody could venture to engage in combat against him, and that he should frighten the Israelites, and have the laugh against them.

Saul and Jonathan, and no doubt many others, were brave men among the Israelites, but "they were dismayed and greatly afraid," on account of this giant.





For forty days did Goliath thus defy and frighten the armies of Israel.

Now three of David's elder brothers happened to be in the army, and their father Jesse desired David to leave the care of the sheep, and to go and take them some food, and inquire if they were in want of anything. And just as he got to the army, the people were shouting, and were about to begin to fight. And David ran into the army to give his brothers refreshment before the battle began. Just at that moment, Goliath appeared again, and challenged the Israelites as before. "And all the men of Israel, when they saw the man, fled from him, and were sore afraid."

Saul had offered to give any man great riches, and he should marry his daughter, and his father's house should also have great honours, if he would dare to fight and beat this dreadful giant.

So David asked the people what any man would have who overthrew him. And his brother Eliab, who looked down upon him with contempt because he was younger and shorter than he, rebuked him for asking the question. But David still continued to ask it, that it might reach the ears of Saul, and he patiently bore the most ill-natured words from his brother.

At last Saul sent for David, and David told him he would go and fight the Philistine. But Saul said he was only a youth, while Goliath had long been a man of war, how then could he hope to beat him?

Then David told him that he had more courage and strength than he supposed, for he had once fought and killed a lion and a bear, that came to steal some of his father's flock, and, said he, "thy servant slew both the lion and the bear, and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be as one of them, seeing he hath defied the armies of the living God." And then he told him why he was so bold, because he trusted in God to help him: "the Lord that delivered me out of the paw of the lion, and out of the paw of the bear, he will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine."

Saul could not any longer object. He saw that God was with David to help him, and he said, "Go, and the Lord be with thee."

So Saul put his own armour upon David, but when it was on him, David said, it must be taken off, for he had not proved, or





was not used to such a sort of armour, and therefore it would only be a hindrance to him.

Then "he took his staff in his hand, and chose him five smooth stones out of the brook, and put them in a shepherd's bag which he had, even in a scrip, and his sling was in his hand, and he drew near to the Philistine."

Now David was very active, and he was clever in throwing a stone from a sling, and God gave him more than common strength and skill on this occasion.

The Philistine marched forward in a very stately manner, and his armour-bearer was before him, bearing his shield. And when he saw David, he disdained him, and seeing his staff in his hand, he asked him if he thought that he was no better than a dog, that he should dare to come to fight him with nothing but a stick, and he was so enraged, that he cursed David by his gods. And then he said to him in angry ridicule, "Come to me, and I will give thy flesh unto the fowls of the air, and to the beasts of the field." This was indeed a frightful threat, uttered perhaps with a hoarse and strong voice like the growl of a lion; but David did not fear the boaster, and he replied, "Thou comest to me with a sword and with a spear, and with a shield; but I come to thee in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom thou hast defied. This day will the Lord deliver thee into mine hand, and I will smite thee, and take thine head from thee, and I will give the carcasses of the host of the Philistines this day unto the fowls of the air, and to the wild beasts of the earth; that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel. And all this assembly shall know that that the Lord saveth not with sword and spear; for the battle is the Lord's, and he will give you into our hands."

See how different was the language of David to that of the Philistine. Goliath talked of what he himself would do; but David said, "The Lord will deliver thee into my hand," and he did not trust in God in vain.

And now the combat began; "the Philistine arose and came and drew nigh to meet David." And David ran to meet this huge man, moving like a mountain and cased in brass. We may sup-





pose that Goliath reckoned that in a few moments he should cut off the head of this rash youth, and laugh at the folly of the Israelites in sending forth such a champion; while the Israelites quaked, lest the fair form of such a courageous youth should fall beneath the sword of this tyrant.

But they had not long to think. "David put his hand in his bag, and took thence a stone and slang it, and smote the Philistine in his forehead, that the stone sunk into his forehead; and he fell upon his face to the earth." He was covered with brass in every other part but his face, and at this David took sure aim, and had he failed the first time, he had still four stones left. Some think that he had a covering over his forehead called the beaver of the helmet, and that he had put it up, or David's stone would not have killed him; but we are told in ancient writings, that good slingers would even break in pieces shields, helmets, and all kinds of armour, so that, even then, the stone might have passed through the armour into the forehead.

"So David prevailed over the Philistine with a sling and with a stone, and smote the Philistine and slew him." Then, having no sword of his own, David took that of the Philistine, and cut off his head.

And now, the Philistines having lost their champion, were in a terrible state of alarm. They were not willing to throw down their arms and be the slaves of Israel, as had been proposed by Goliath; and so the Israelites fell upon them as they fled, and pursued them to the very gates of their own cities.

David now took the head of Goliath with him to Jerusalem, and Saul saw him, and though he had played before him when he was melancholy, owing to his state of mind at that time, he did not remember him, and inquired whose son he was; and he learnt that this hero was a son of Jesse the Bethlehemite.





THE EIGHTEENTH, NINETEENTH, AND TWENTIETH CHAPTERS OF
I. SAMUEL.

Jonathan's love to David, and Saul's hatred of him, and attempts to take his life.

"And David sware, moreover, and said, Thy father certainly knoweth that I have found grace in thine eyes: and he saith, Let not Jonathan know this, lest he be grieved; but, surely as the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, there is but a step between me and death."—Chap. xx. 3.

David was now entirely taken into Saul's court, and Jonathan, Saul's son, seeing him to be so brave and good, loved him very much, and made an agreement with him, that let what would happen, they should always be friends; and as presents of clothes are marks of respect and friendship in the East, Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that was upon him, and gave it to David, and his garments, "even to his sword, and to his bow, and to his girdle;" so he lost the humble dress of a shepherd, and was now fit to appear among the people of the court.

Saul also made David a commander over all his troops, and on every expedition on which he sent him, he showed himself so brave and wise that every body respected him.

Saul now went everywhere about his kingdom to meet his people in triumph, because the Philistines,—the great enemies of Israel,—were so completely beaten. And the women, as usual on such occasions, "came out of all the cities of Israel, singing and dancing, to meet king Saul, with tabrets, with joy, and with instruments of music. And the women answered one another as they played, and said, Saul hath slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands;" this was probably the chorus of their song of victory. It was rather vexing to Saul to hear David so exalted above himself, and perhaps it was not quite wise in the women to praise the general above the king, especially as Saul's haughty





spirit must have been known ; however, it was a fact, that Saul had only fought with portions of the Philistines, while when David beat them, their whole army was drawn out.

From that day Saul eyed David with much jealousy, and his evil spirit returned ; and while David was kindly trying to soothe him by playing his music, Saul artfully pretended to prophesy or to pray, so that David could expect no ill design. At the same time, Saul held a javelin or dart in his hand, and cast it at David, intending to thrust him through, even so as to fasten him to the wall.

Jealousy is a sad passion, and is often exercised by bad men against good ones, even for excelling them in doing good things ; and in aiming to make this passion act to the injury of the innocent, pretences to religion are sometimes put on. You must not, therefore, wonder if you occasionally hear of good men being used ill or ungratefully, for doing good actions ; nor if you hear that some have been ill-treated, while those hurting them have pretended to be very religious. But, as you must surely despise the attempt of Saul to kill David, after he had saved the nation, so I hope you will ever learn to avoid jealous feelings towards others who may be praised more than you, and to abhor seeming to do pious things, when you have only a bad design concealed under them. If you are artful while you are young, you will become more so when you grow up to be men, and nothing is more to be despised than a cunning, artful man.

Saul was now afraid of David, and perhaps thought that he would grow too strong for him, by growing in favour with the people ; so to get rid of him, and in hopes that he might be slain, he gave him a command, and sent him out to the wars. But he behaved so well, that he still increased in favour with Israel.

Saul, as you have been told, had promised the man who should meet Goliath, that he should marry his daughter as a mark of great honour ; however, he broke his word, and gave his eldest daughter to another, when she ought to have been David's wife.

But the king had another daughter called Michal, and she was very fond of David. And Saul said he would give her to him, if within a certain time, he would kill a hundred more Philis-





tines. So David killed the Philistines in the time required of him, and married Saul's daughter.

Saul was no better pleased on this account, for he had now made David a greater man than he was before, but he was vexed that his plans to destroy David had not succeeded, and he became David's enemy continually.

Then "Saul spake to Jonathan his son, and to all his servants, that they should kill David;" but Jonathan, like a true friend, told David, and advised him to get out of his way till he had tried to plead in his behalf.

Then Jonathan spoke to his father, and told him what great good David had done to the country, and how innocent his conduct was towards him, and that it would be very cruel and unjust to put him to death. And Saul was persuaded by Jonathan, and declared that he would think no more of doing him harm. So after this promise David was permitted to go into Saul's presence as before.

Soon after this, there was war again, and David triumphed gloriously over the Philistines, so that Saul was again jealous of him; and his evil spirit returned, and David, as before, played his harp to amuse him; and again he flung his javelin furiously at him, so that it stuck in the wall, but God preserved David, and he slipped away without receiving any harm.

Saul now resolved that David should escape no more, and so he sent messengers to lie in wait for him at his own house. Michal, his wife, saw what was going on, and she advised David to escape, and as they guarded the doors, she "let David down through a window; and he went and fled and escaped."

"And Michal took an image, and laid it in the bed, and put a pillow of goat's hair for his bolster, and covered it with a cloth. And when Saul sent messengers to take David, she said, he is sick." She meant the image to appear in the bed like a sick person lying there, so that if the officers came, they either would not touch a sick man, or perhaps, if they even stabbed the place, they might go away and suppose they had killed David, and so





seek no more after him. At all events, by framing this excuse, she gained time for him to escape, and to get too far off for his foes to pursue him. But it was very wrong in her to tell a lie; for this she certainly did, and there was not even an excuse for it, for David was already out of harm's way.

Saul was now so resolved to kill David that if he were sick he could not wait for him to die, but desired that he might be taken to his sick bed to kill him. O what a malicious, wicked man, does Saul here appear!

The next time the messengers went, they looked more closely into the bed, to see how David was; and then they found that Michal had cheated them, and that nothing was there but an image. And Saul, on learning this, was very angry with his daughter, who would have been a wicked woman indeed, had she delivered up her innocent husband to be slain.

Michal was afraid of her father, knowing what a passionate man he was, and she seems to have been but too ready to tell a lie, for she now excused herself, by saying what could never have happened with David, for he was not blood-thirsty: "He said unto me, Let me go; why should I kill thee?" that is, 'If you try to prevent my escaping, I will run you through.'

In the mean time David escaped in safety to Samuel, at Ramah; "and he and Samuel went and dwelt in Naioth."

When Saul found out where he was, he again sent messengers to take him, and they found Samuel's scholars in his school of young prophets, prophesying or praising God, and probably, David with them; for it was a work in which his heart delighted. And "the Spirit of God was upon the messengers of Saul, and they also prophesied," or praised God. These not returning, Saul sent again, and it happened the same with them. Then he sent a third time, and it still happened the same. So at last he resolved to go himself, and now God touched his heart, and he too caught the spirit of praise, and began to prophesy with the others, to the wonder of all, so that they said, "Is Saul also among the prophets?" And this question is now turned into a kind of proverb, or common saying, so that when a wicked man puts on the pretence of religion, we ask the question, "Is Saul also among the prophets?"





While Saul was at Naioth, David escaped to Jonathan, whom he still found a faithful friend. He then told him of his father's settled intention to take away his life; but, knowing that David had done nothing to deserve Saul's hatred, Jonathan could hardly believe it, and perhaps thought that what he had before done, was when he was not exactly in his right mind.

Then David told him, that on the morrow the king would expect to see him fill his place at table, and if he missed him and expressed himself angry, he might be sure that he would but show how he felt towards him; but if he did not break out in ill words, he might hope for the best. And Jonathan agreed to meet him in three days, at an appointed place, and to take a lad with him; and he was to shoot some arrows near where David was to lie concealed, and he would tell the lad to run and fetch the arrows; and if he said, "The arrows are on this side of thee," then David might go in peace, and be sure Saul had not shown any intention to do him harm: but if he told him, "The arrows are beyond thee," then David was to save himself, for he would be in danger.

So, on the next day, David's place at table was not filled; but the king, supposing that some uncleanness, according to the law, prevented him from being present that day, said nothing about his absence. However, the day following he again missed him, and asked Jonathan about him, and was very angry not to see him; and he desired David to be brought to him to be executed. But Jonathan asked, "Wherefore shall he be slain? What hath he done?" At this Saul was still more angry, "and he cast a javelin at him to smite him." So Jonathan left the table, and was very angry in turn, for his father made him grieved for David, because he was wrongly made to suffer shame.

Faithful to his word, as upright people always must be, Jonathan went on the morrow to the place appointed in a field, took a lad with him, and shot the arrows, and gave the sign by which David knew that his life was still in danger from Saul.

As probably no one appeared near, Jonathan then ventured to go to David's hiding-place, first sending the lad away with his bow and arrows.

Then David and Jonathan kissed one another, and wept one





with another," and made a vow to be faithful to one another, and to each other's children for the fathers' sakes.

David then "arose and departed, and Jonathan went into the city."

THE TWENTY-FIRST CHAPTER OF I. SAMUEL.

David eats the shew-bread—Feigns himself mad at Gath.

"So the priest gave him hallowed bread; for there was no bread there but the shew-bread that was taken from before the Lord, to put hot bread in the day when it was taken away.

"And the servants of Achish said unto him, Is not this David the king of the land?—did they not sing one to another of him in dances, saying, Saul hath slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands?

"And David laid up these words in his heart, and was sore afraid of Achish the king of Gath.

"And he changed his behaviour before them, and feigned himself mad in their hands, and scrabbled on the doors of the gate, and let his spittle fall down upon his beard.

"Then said Achish unto his servants, Lo, you see the man is mad, wherefore then have ye brought him to me?"—Vers. 6, 11, 12, 13, 14.

As Jonathan had no power to protect David against Saul his father, David took to flight, and went to Nob to visit Ahimelech the priest, who "inquired of the Lord for him." As he was very hungry, he also gave him some of the shew-bread which belonged to the priests, and which had been set a proper time before the Lord in the sacred place, to be replaced by hot bread, which would likewise remain a proper time and then be removed for the priests in the same way.

Of this shew-bread you have before read in the chapter on the Tabernacle and its Furniture; it was to consist of twelve loaves of unleavened bread, or bread without yeast,—one being weekly presented for every tribe, and after having remained from the





Sabbath day on which they were presented, till the next Sabbath day, when fresh ones were presented, they became the perquisites of the priests, to help to support them.

Ahimelech, indeed, at first objected to David's having any of this food, designed only for persons who always were employed in serving the Lord; and especially did he object to any of his servants partaking of it. You have often been told, dear reader, that there were many ceremonies under Moses's law, and this will account for the remark of the priest, that if David's servants had not lately kept company with women, they might eat of the holy bread. This was like the law which made it defiling to touch a dead body, and many others for which we can assign no other reason than that they were ceremonies, having all of them important meanings, which were doubtless well understood by pious Jews.

Ahimelech also let David take away with him Goliath's sword, which, according to the custom of those times, being a valuable trophy or proof of victory, was laid up in the sacred place.

It must not, however, be passed over that Ahimelech was quite surprised to see David, who was lately the favourite at court, come to him without any but common attendants, and he said, "Why art thou alone, and no man with thee?" not that there was no person with him of any kind, for there were "young men," inferior servants,—but he meant to say, "How is it that you have no grand attendants with you? I fear all is not right; and if so, I may displease the king by doing any kindness to you." David, to save himself, was guilty of saying what was not true, and he pretended that he was going on a particular errand for Saul, and as it was a secret, his servants were sent away.

It is a shocking thing for any one to tell a lie, but still more for a good man to be guilty of such a thing. And you would perhaps be puzzled to know what to make of it, if you happened to observe it, without an explanation. Well then, you must observe, that by deceiving this priest, David brought a dreadful event to pass,—and so was punished with pain in his mind for telling it; for Saul was so angry at Ahimelech's showing him any kindness, that in his rage he slew eighty-five priests and all their





families, as you will hereafter read. No doubt but this was one of those sins over which David mourned with great grief, for a good man always finds "that it is an evil and a bitter thing to sin against God." Do not, dear young reader, O do not give way to lying, for if your sin is ever pardoned, you must deeply repent of it; and, if you repent of it, God will pardon you, not because you repent, but because your grief shows that your mind is prepared to receive pardon, which he freely bestows through Jesus Christ—but that repentance will yet be very painful indeed.

David next fled into the country of the Philistines, where he hoped no one would find him out, for he might reckon that it would hardly be supposed by Saul that he would go to the people whose champion he had slain, nor would they be likely to suspect that he had been so daring as to venture among them. Yet it is thought by some that Achish the king of Gath, where Goliath lived, knew who David was, and received him, either admiring his bravery as a soldier, or being pleased that he had killed Goliath, who, as he was a very terrible person, might have even kept his own king in fear of him.

However, at all events, the servants of Achish spied David out, and asked whether he was not the man whose victory over their champion had lately made a subject for the songs of their enemies. And David hearing them talk in this way, began to be frightened, and so he pretended to be mad, and Achish told them to drive him away, but it does not appear that they hurt him, for if they had any feelings of a humane kind about them, they must have felt pity for a madman. It was, however, a mean kind of act for David to pretend to be mad, for he was under the especial care of Providence, and not a hair of his head would have been hurt; but David seems at this time to have wanted that trust in God, which he had when he went forth to meet Goliath, and when perhaps every one in Israel trembled for him but himself.





THE TWENTY-SECOND CHAPTER OF I. SAMUEL.

David in the cave of Adullam, and the Priests slain by order of Saul.

“And the king said to Doeg, Turn thou and fall upon the priests. And Doeg the Edomite turned, and he fell upon the priests, and slew on that day fourscore and five persons that did wear a linen ephod.

“And Nob, the city of the priests, smote he with the edge of the sword, both men and women, children and sucklings, and oxen, and asses, and sheep, with the edge of the sword.”—Vers. 18, 19.

On leaving Gath, David fled to the cave of Adullam, which was probably near to the city of the same name in the tribe of Judah, mentioned in the fifteenth chapter of Joshua. This being a strong place, and in his own tribe, he might hope to be in greater safety. Here he was joined by a number of persons who, for various reasons, did not like king Saul, and he became captain over them : and there were with him about four hundred men.

Among the rest “his father’s house,” that is, his family, “went down thither to him ;” and as Saul, in his rage against David, might have killed them as he did the priests, David was afraid of trusting them within his reach ; and yet he did not know what to do with his aged father and mother, who were too old to endure all the fatigue which he was likely to suffer in different marches, as well as all the changes of war. So he went to the king of Moab and asked him to give them shelter ; and he said unto the king of Moab, Let my father and my mother, I pray thee, come forth and be with you, till I know what God will do for me.”

The king of Moab was one of Saul’s enemies, and so it was very likely that he would oblige David, who was now as much disliked by Saul as himself.

The king of Moab readily consented, and knowing Saul’s hatred to David, he probably thought that he might receive some help against him from David, some day, in return. And David brought





his parents "before the king of Moab; and they dwelt with him all the while that David was in the hold" or fortress of Adullam.

This conduct of David towards his father and mother was very amiable. How high soever your rank in life may happen to be above that of your parents, never forget your duty towards them; and when their old age requires your care, show them all the kindness in your power.

For some time probably Saul had heard nothing of David, but now a report reached him that he was in arms, and at the head of a number of men, at which he was greatly alarmed. Being of a jealous disposition, he fancied that his son Jonathan, and the servants that were about him, had conspired with David to dethrone him, or take away his kingdom; and he accused them all with being traitors, since no one would tell him anything about the business. But, as no such conspiracy had existed, how then could they tell him?

However, Doeg the Edomite, who was with him, thought he should get into favour by telling him about Ahimelech, the priest, having given David victuals and the sword of Goliath,—for Doeg happened to be in the tabernacle when Ahimelech and David were there. In chapter twenty-one, and the seventh verse, we read, "Now a certain man of the servants of Saul was there that day, detained before the Lord;" that is, he was stopping in the tabernacle, probably to offer some sacrifice to the Lord; "and his name was Doeg, an Edomite, the chiefest of the herdsmen that belonged to Saul;" an officer who most likely overlooked all the keepers of the herds and flocks, to see that they did their duty and took proper care of them.

As soon as Saul heard what Ahimelech had done, he sent for all the priests that were in Nob, and on their appearance before him, he spoke very rudely to Ahimelech, and charged him with being a conspirator, and with asking counsel from God against him. Ahimelech was no doubt startled and surprised, and defended himself by saying, that he thought David was on a message for the king, as he had told him,—that being the king's son-in-law and a faithful servant to him, he did not suppose that he was doing anything wrong in helping him when he wanted refreshment;





and, as for inquiring of God for him, it was not the first time, for David as a pious man was used to ask counsel of God. This was then done by the priests, but all good men now ask counsel of God themselves in prayer. Ahimelech then said that he was not to blame, and that what he had done, if wrong, was quite innocently done.

Saul would hear no defence. A man in a rage is like a wild beast; "and the king said, Thou shalt surely die, Ahimelech, thou and all thy father's house." What a barbarous decree!—and he found one as wicked as himself ready to execute it. He turned first to his footmen, who used to run before him when he went from place to place, and said, "Turn and slay the priests of the Lord." What a daring command to slay God's priests! The footmen were, however, more convinced of their innocency than their rash master, and had more reverence for the servants of God, therefore, in spite of his rage, they would not, at his command, bathe their hands in innocent blood.

Then the king said to Doeg, "Turn thou and fall upon the priests." The false accuser readily obeyed the brutish order, and most likely assisted by some of his servants, Doeg slew eighty-five of the priests who wore the linen ephod, or priest's robe. After this he went to Nob, where he killed with the sword all the men, women, and children, and even the cattle, and so destroyed the whole population of the place, consisting of the priests and their families. This was very barbarous and very wicked, and Saul and Doeg would have to answer for the crime. Yet what God had foretold against the house of Eli, in which were perhaps many other wicked priests like his sons, who "made themselves vile," was now all brought to pass. These priests were of that family, and God had said by Samuel, "I will do a thing in Israel, at which both the ears of every one that heareth it shall tingle. In that day I will perform against Eli all things which I have spoken concerning his house; when I begin I will also make an end." Dear young reader, God is just in all his ways, and if we repent not of our sins against him, he will at last make us know that "the end of these things is death." Saul and Doeg both did wickedly in killing the priests, and yet they were God's execu-





tioners, to fulfil his decree against a family that had been guilty of defiling his altar.

One priest only had escaped, this was Abiathar, and he fled to David for protection, who by this event was favoured with the aid of a priest through whom he might always ask counsel of God in all his dangers.

THE TWENTY-THIRD CHAPTER OF I. SAMUEL.

David having defeated the Philistines at Keilah, is still pursued by Saul.

“And Saul sought him every day, but God delivered him not into his hands.”—Ver. 14.

David was now in the land of Judah, according to the orders of the prophet Gad. He had not long returned before the Philistines attacked a city and fortified place called Keilah, which stood near their country; and as it was threshing time, and this work was done out of the city for the sake of having more wind to blow away the chaff from the wheat, the Philistines took away the corn which the people were threshing and winnowing.

David was too much of a patriot—that is, he loved his country too much—patiently to see it robbed by the Philistines; but he did not know whether he ought to oppose them, as he had no orders from Saul, who was his king, and as his own army was very small. So he asked counsel of the Lord, and the answer was, “Go and smite the Philistines and save Keilah.”

David's soldiers were afraid that they were not numerous enough for the enterprise; however, David asked counsel again, and God still said, “Go.” So David attacked the Philistines, and beat them, and for his reward he got their cattle which they had brought to feed their armies, which were most likely of great service to him.

Men do not ask God if they shall go to war now; they go to war according to their own fancy, and when they do this they do





wickedly; however, the time will come when the gospel which makes men peaceable, shall everywhere prevail, and then, (O what happy days!) men shall learn war no more.

David having saved Keilah, we should have supposed Saul would have sent to him a message of peace, and have been satisfied that he who fought his enemies was no conspirator, for then he would have joined them against Saul. Instead, however, of rewarding David with thanks and kindness, he was glad to find out where he was, that he might go and try to kill him. "And Saul said, God hath delivered him into mine hand; for he is shut in by entering into a town that hath gates and bars. And Saul called all the people together to war, to go down to Keilah, to besiege David and his men."

David again inquired of the Lord, and he found that if he remained in Keilah, the people would forget how much they owed to him for saving them, and would, for fear of Saul, deliver him into his hand.

So David left Keilah. By this time his men had increased to six hundred, for, perhaps some of the people of that place had united with them.

David next went into the wilderness or desert of Ziph, and remained hid there among the rocks in a mountain, or sometimes in a wood. Here Jonathan found him out and visited him, "and strengthened his hand in God," encouraging him to put his trust in him, and he told him that he was sure God would protect him, and make him at last king over Israel. Then David and Jonathan made a covenant to be faithful to each other, and Jonathan returned home.

Then the people of Ziph went and told Saul where David was, and Saul was quite pleased, and hoped he should soon take him. But by the time he had arrived, David having found out that he was approaching him, escaped into the wilderness of Maon; and there again Saul pursued him and nearly overtook him; indeed, he was so close upon his heels, that his army was on one side of a mountain, and David's on the other; and he was contriving how he could surround the mountain, and so make him prisoner.

At that very moment news reached Saul, that the Philistines





had "invaded the land," and he was pressed to make all haste with his army and meet them ; so he was obliged to give up pursuing David "and went against the Philistines ;" and the place was in memory of that circumstance called Sélahammahlekoth, which means "the rock of divisions," because the rocky mountain divided David's army from Saul's army, and here God by his providence caused Saul to separate himself from David when he was bent on pursuing him.

Then "David went up from thence and dwelt in strong holds at Engedi," another place which lay in the wilderness of Judah.

THE TWENTY-FOURTH CHAPTER OF I. SAMUEL.

Saul's skirt cut off by David.

"Then David arose, and cut off the skirt of Saul's robe privily."
Ver. 4.

When Saul had returned from following the Philistines, he again found where David was. So he "took three thousand chosen men out of all Israel, and went to seek David and his men upon the rocks of the wild goats." These rocks were in the wilderness of Engedi, and they were called "the rocks of wild goats," because these creatures delighted to be there. They are described by travellers as being very high indeed, and very rough, so that they are quite awful to look at, and being very difficult to ascend, David and his men thought that they might safely hide in them. However, Saul was resolved to pursue them even there.

"And he came to the sheep-cotes by the way, where was a cave ; and Saul went in to cover his feet : and David and his men remained in the sides of the cave."

The sheep-cotes were places for the sheep to be led into at noon, to shelter them from the heat ; the cave was a very large one, for there are caves in that part which though very dark, are yet roomy enough to hold many thousand men. And here Saul laid down to rest, covering his feet, on which he probably had nothing



but sandals, so that he might keep them warm with his long robes and hide his naked limbs. But, who should be in this cave, but David and his men, who, while they were concealed in the farthest part, could see Saul come in at the mouth, it being light there, while they at the farthest end were all in the dark.



David's men were rejoiced, and advised their master at once to kill Saul; but David would not be his murderer, and so he only went quietly up to where he was stretched upon the ground,—being most likely asleep,—and he cut off the skirt of his robe; but he was even afterwards vexed with himself for doing this, as he thought it was an insult to him whom God had placed over him in authority, and who was therefore, in his mind, entitled to all possible respect. Saul might, however, see by this act of David,—when he should learn what he had done,—that he was not a traitor to him, or he might easily have taken his life.

Saul having refreshed himself, left the cave and went on, without having any notion that David and his men were there.

David now boldly followed him out of the cave, and cried after





him with a loud voice, "My lord the king. And when Saul looked behind him, David stooped with his face to the earth and bowed himself," to show that he still wished to treat him with the respect of a sovereign. And then David asked Saul why he listened to reports against him, that he meant to do him hurt. And he showed him his skirt which he had cut off without killing him, though he could then as easily have cut off his head; and yet Saul hunted after his life as he would hunt a wild beast. And he said, "The Lord avenge me of thee!"—meaning, that if he would still persecute him, he would still avoid killing him if in his power, and leave his case with God. And he asked Saul, "After whom is the king of Israel come out? after whom dost thou pursue?—after a dead dog—after a flea?" For he, David, with six hundred men, could do him no more harm than a dead dog, and was as insignificant, in comparison with himself, as a poor despised insect.

Though Saul might now have returned and fallen upon David, his heart was restrained by the power of God, or perhaps his men were at some distance, and David could have escaped before he could collect them. David's appearance, and kind words, and the mercy he had shown him also, astonished him and softened his heart, and he called David his son, as he was,—David having first addressed him as father,—as he had married his daughter,—and he even was so much affected that he wept aloud. And he owned that David was more righteous than he, and had rewarded him good, "whereas," said he, "I have rewarded thee evil;" for though he had saved Israel by slaying Goliath, and fought against the Philistines, and charmed away his evil spirit, yet still he had tried to kill one who had done so much for him. And Saul also confessed that he now believed David would be king, and his conscience told him that he was the neighbour better than he, to whom Saul had said the kingdom should be given when it was taken from him.

In eastern kingdoms it is usual, when a new family comes to the throne, to have all the children of the old family killed, lest any of them should, in time, try to recover the throne of their father; and Saul, believing that David would yet be king, and





fearing that he would kill his sons, asked him to swear that he would show them mercy. So he solemnly declared that he would, which is what is meant by swearing on this occasion,—making a solemn promise.

After this conversation, Saul went home to his palace in Gibeah, and David knowing that he could not trust Saul, went with his men to the hold or place of safety among the rocks.

THE TWENTY-FIFTH CHAPTER OF I. SAMUEL.

Samuel's death—Nabal's ill-behaviour to David.

“Now the name of the man was Nabal; and the name of his wife Abigail: and she was a woman of good understanding, and of a beautiful countenance: but the man was churlish and evil in his doings; and he was of the house of Caleb.”—Ver. 3.

At this time Samuel died, and as he had been a good judge when he ruled over Israel, and was a pious prophet, his death was lamented by all the Israelites, and he was buried “in his house at Ramah,”—that is, according to the common customs of those times, within the walls where his house stood, and most likely in a tomb in his garden.

But this chapter more particularly tells us about a rich man who lived in Maon, a city of the tribe of Judah, and who had great possessions in Carmel, another city of Judah, which stood upon a mountain of the same name. The wealth of men in those times generally consisted in herds and flocks, and we learn that he had three thousand sheep, and a thousand goats. He was also of the house or family of Caleb, and so of the tribe of Judah, which being the same tribe as that to which David belonged, made what I am going to tell you so much the more unnatural in him.

This Nabal happened to be at Carmel shearing his sheep, and David, being in great want of provision for himself and his men, sent a very civil message to him, to ask him to let him have some





for his soldiers had been very kind to Nabal's shepherds; and especially as sheep-shearing was a feasting-time, he might spare him a little very well; and as there were only ten young men sent from David's army, they could not carry a great deal.

Now "Nabal," being a very surly sort of a man, "answered David's servants, and said, Who is David?—and who is the son of Jesse? There be many servants now-a-days that break away every man from his master;" meaning that he knew nothing about this David,—though he did know him, for he called him the son of Jesse;—and as for his servants, they were a set of runaway fellows, and he should give them nothing.

So David's servants, being affronted, said nothing to him, but turned their backs and went and told David how he had behaved.

David then ordered his men to put on their swords, and leaving two hundred to watch his baggage, he marched with four hundred men to punish Nabal.

In the mean time, one of Nabal's young men told Abigail, Nabal's wife, how rudely his master had behaved to David's messengers, and that they ought to have been better treated, for, said he, "the men were very good unto us, and we were not hurt, neither missed we any thing, as long as we were conversant with them, when we were in the fields. They were a wall unto us both by night and day, all the while we were with them keeping the sheep."

Now this made Nabal's behaviour still worse. His shepherds had been keeping their flocks very near David's troops. In those parts were many wild Arabs, as there are to this day, and they would have thought it their right to take any of Nabal's flocks to feed themselves, because they think themselves kings of that wild country; but David's troops always kept them away, and if any wild beast had come near, still they were ready to defend them, while they received nothing for their services. So that what David asked in his need, and might have taken by force, was a kind of debt which Nabal owed him for guarding his property,—at least it was a debt of gratitude, which he ought to have paid. We ought to be kind to all; but to return evil for good to those who are kind to us, is base indeed.





Nabal's servant saw that David must be provoked, and so he advised his mistress to do something to reconcile him.

"Then Abigail made haste, and took two hundred loaves, and two bottles of wine, and five sheep ready dressed, and five measures of parched corn, and an hundred clusters of raisins, and two hundred cakes of figs, and laid them on asses. And she said unto her servants, Go on before me; behold, I come after you. But she told not her husband Nabal." It would have been of no use to talk to Nabal,—for he was very obstinate,—and so while she was trying to persuade him to send these things to David, David would have arrived and mischief must have happened. For David lost his temper, and in his passion,—which was very blameable,—he vowed that he would that night destroy Nabal, and all his household.

Before Abigail could reach David he was on his march to attack Nabal, but she met him on a hill, and lighted from the beautiful eastern ass on which she rode, and, according to the manner of the country, in token of high respect for David, "she bowed herself to the ground, and fell at his feet;" and then she begged David to blame her, and not her husband, that nothing was given to his messengers,—for Nabal was a silly man, as his name signified, and what could he expect from a fool?—this she said by way of excuse, and to save Nabal, which was a good reason for her using a name she ought not in any other case to have applied to her husband. Then she told David how glad he ought to be that he had not in his anger shed blood, and wished that all his enemies were but as insignificant as Nabal; and begged him earnestly to accept of her present for the use of his young men, as being scarcely worth his acceptance for his own use. Moreover, she told him that God would, without doubt, deliver him from his troubles, and bind his soul up "in the bundle of life," or keep it in safety as we keep things tied up in a bundle; and that God would sling out the souls of his enemies, "as out of the middle of a sling;" meaning by this, that he would remove them swiftly and suddenly, and with force, out of the world, as a stone is slung out of the middle of a sling; for so suddenly did Saul afterwards perish in the field of battle.





See how "a soft answer turneth away wrath." David now blessed God that he had inclined Abigail's heart to go and meet him; and he blessed her and her kind advice, which had prevented him from shedding blood; and he took her present, "and said unto her, Go up in peace to thine house: see, I have hearkened to thy voice, and have accepted thy person;" that is, "I am pleased with all your own behaviour."

When Abigail returned home, Nabal was feasting at the sheep-shearing feast, and he had supplied it so well, that it was fit for a king. It appears that he had also got drunk, and having by this made himself worse than a beast, she told him nothing of what had happened between her and David, till he should become sober and fit to hear it.

But in the morning she informed him of the danger he had escaped from David and his four hundred men, and he was so struck with his narrow escape that he fainted away; perhaps, too, he feared lest David should yet fall upon him. In about ten days after—he died.

When David heard of Nabal's death, he blessed the Lord. This was not because he maliciously rejoiced in his death, but because God had visited him with his own hand, instead of his having slain him himself, while he was in a dangerous rage.

Abigail's beauty, grace, wisdom, and piety, had won the heart of David; and so he sent to her at one of her husband's houses which was at Carmel, and proposed to marry her; she expressed herself sensible of the high honour of becoming his wife, of which she in her humility did not think herself worthy, but rather fit to wash the feet of David's servants; and then, according to the custom of the times, she went to David's residence. So David, most probably, now became possessed of all the property of Nabal, who had denied him the most humble request.

David had also another wife, Ahinoam of Jezreel; but Michal, Saul's daughter, who was also David's wife, had been married by her father to another man, that David might not have any pretension from that to inheriting his crown.

The custom of having more than one wife is not allowed to Christians; Jesus Christ condemned it and quite did it away; for





you remember that Isaac and Ishmael, the sons of Sarah and Hagar, quarrelled; and the children of several mothers living in one family must be very likely to do the same, and to make a house a frequent place of confusion. Jesus Christ has done away with many of the laws and customs of the Jews, only to make us more happy here and hereafter.

THE TWENTY-SIXTH CHAPTER OF I. SAMUEL.

Saul's spear and cruse taken from him while asleep, by David.

“So David took the spear and the cruse of water from Saul's bolster; and they gat them away, and no man saw it, nor knew it, neither awaked; for they were all asleep, because a deep sleep from the Lord was fallen upon them.”—Ver. 12.

Though Saul had appeared reconciled to David, after having had so strong a proof as he gave him that he was no traitor, yet still his revengeful feelings towards him revived; and having been once more informed by the Ziphites, that David had returned to the hill of Hachilah, he again went after him with three thousand men.

David, however, happened not to be in the hill, but in the wilderness, but there Saul pursued him; and David having found out, by spies, where Saul's camp was, he resolved to go to it by night and inspect it.

He then discovered where Saul's ground and royal tent was, and, as is the custom of the Arabs to this time, the people pitched in a circle about him.

Then David asked if any one of those that were with him would go into the camp; for it would not have been safe for more to have entered it, lest their footsteps should have awakened the people. “And Abishai said, I will go down with thee.”

“So David and Abishai came to the people by night: and, behold, Saul lay sleeping within the trench,”—or within his tent, or





camp—"and his spear stuck in the ground at his bolster; but Abner and the people lay round about him."

This was a very bold step, for two men to go into an enemy's camp of three thousand men, even though it were night, for some might have been awake, or at least some sentinels or guards might have been on the watch; but they all seem to have presumed on being secure, and being all fatigued,—perhaps with marching in the course of the day,—they all slept soundly; nor was this a common sleep, for "a deep sleep from the Lord had fallen upon them." David's courage and their sleep were both ordered of the Lord to prove his innocence.

Abishai would now have persuaded David to let him kill Saul, as he knew David had refused to do it himself; he told him that God had delivered his enemy into his hand, and if he would only give him leave, he would thrust him through with his own spear, and do it so completely, that a second thrust would not be wanted to despatch him.

But if David had given Abishai leave, it would have been the same thing as if he had done the deed himself; for he who urges another to do a wrong thing, is as bad as the one that does it.

David therefore said, "Destroy him not: for who can stretch forth his hand against the Lord's anointed, and be guiltless?" David said furthermore, "As the Lord liveth, the Lord shall smite him; or his day shall come to die; or he shall descend into battle and perish;" and so he did at last. However, to prove that Saul had again been in his power, he told Abishai to take away his spear and a cruse of water that was near him.

David then left the camp with the spear and the cruse, and going to the top of a hill opposite to that where Saul was—so that he could not be pursued without first descending a hill, then crossing a valley, and then mounting another hill—he aroused Abner the captain of Saul's host, and he told him what a careless sort of a soldier he was to keep no better guard over his master, and showed him the spear and the cruse, to prove that he had been in the camp and might easily have killed Saul.

Saul was awakened by what passed, and hearing David's voice, called to him and spoke kindly to him.





David again complained to Saul of his cruelly pursuing him; and Saul said, "I have sinned: return, my son David; for I will no more do thee harm, because my soul was precious in thine eyes this day: behold, I have played the fool, and have erred exceedingly."

David then showed the king's spear,—which is thought also to have been his sceptre,—and lest it should be supposed he wanted to keep this in order to usurp his royal power, he begged Saul to send a person for it and he should have it,—not being willing to trust himself, by taking it, to Saul, whose evil disposition was such that he could neither believe what he promised, nor trust himself within his reach.

David then uttered a prayer, that God would reward his integrity and deliver him out of his trouble; and Saul could not avoid blessing him, and parted with these words, "Thou shalt both do great things and also shalt prevail."

THE TWENTY-SEVENTH CHAPTER OF I. SAMUEL.

David's flight to Gath, and residence at Ziklag.

"Then Achish gave him Ziklag that day: wherefore Ziklag pertaineth unto the kings of Judah unto this day."—Ver. 6.

As Saul seemed resolved to give David no rest, and there was no reliance to be placed upon his word, David thought that he had better once more seek safety in the land of the Philistines. So he went with all his men to Gath, and Achish was, no doubt, glad to get such a force of bold men from the side of King Saul.

When Saul found that David had left the kingdom, "he sought no more again for him," for it was of no use.

David, in all probability, now thought that the lords of the Philistines would be jealous of him if he continued in their royal city, so he asked Achish to appoint him a dwelling somewhere else. Achish did so very readily, and gave him the city of Ziklag, said to have been about twelve miles from Gath. This city





was in the lot of Judah, when the lands were divided among the people (see Joshua, xv. 31) ; but it had by some means fallen into the hands of the Philistines, and now it was restored to one of Judah's tribe, and became David's own.

You remember that God had ordered the Amalekites to be cut off on account of their wickedness, and David now invaded their country that he might fulfil God's decree, and perform—as God's anointed—that work of justice which Saul neglected to do, and for which neglect he lost his kingdom.

As we have seen that David inquired of God in all cases of importance, most likely he did so before he went against these wicked people, and so he succeeded and was rewarded with “the sheep and the oxen, and the asses, and the camels, and the apparel” of the Amalekites, all of which he most likely needed.

Achish heard of David's spoils, and was desirous of knowing where he obtained them ; but he was afraid of letting the king know, and gave him a doubtful answer in reply ; so that Achish thought he had been fighting against Israel, and now reckoned upon him as an ally for all his life.

This was not to the honour of David. He ought to have been open and candid. Good men should never be guilty of mean things. We ought to admire and imitate David's excellencies, but to avoid his faults.

THE TWENTY-EIGHTH CHAPTER OF I. SAMUEL.

The Witch of Endor.

“Then Saul said unto his servants, Seek me a woman that hath a familiar spirit, that I may go to her, and inquire of her. And his servants said to him, Behold, there is a woman that hath a familiar spirit at Endor.”—Ver. 7.

In this chapter we have an account of a grand preparation for war made by the Philistines against Israel. David was now in a difficult situation, for he could not like to join these heathen in



ENDOR: SAUL'S SERVANTS SEEKING THE WITCH.





DAVID MOURNING FOR SAUL AND JONATHAN

W. D. G. 1867



fighting against his countrymen, and yet Achish had a right to look to him for aid, as he had given him protection. David, on being applied to by Achish to go out to battle, gave him another evasive reply, or one by which he might suppose that he would help him, and yet he avoided giving any promise: "And David said to Achish, Surely thou shalt know what thy servant can do." Achish however trusted in David, and believed that he would help him.

And now the Philistines pitched in Shunem, a city on the borders of Judah, and Saul gathered his army together in a range of mountains called Gilboa. "And when Saul saw the host of the Philistines, he was afraid, and his heart greatly trembled."

In his perplexity he would fain have known the will of God as to what he should do, but he had forsaken God, and so God had forsaken him; and he received no answer to his anxious inquiries, either by dreams, in which God used then sometimes to speak; or by Urim, which you remember was something in the priest's breast-plate which was used to direct in times of difficulty, and which was now in the hands of Abiathar, who was with David; or by prophets, for Samuel was dead, and none of his school at Naioth in Ramah was divinely directed to guide him.

So Saul determined that he would go to a witch, or woman fortune-teller, from whom he was foolish enough to believe that he should learn all that he wanted. This woman was called one that had "a familiar spirit," that is, some kind of spirit living in the other world, with whom she was allowed to make free, and who could tell her all she wanted to know about things that were to happen.

Now it was very silly of Saul to think that a poor old woman could know the mind of God about what was coming to pass, but he was not the only person who was so foolish, or the old witch could not have lived by her art; and I am grieved to tell you, that even now, there are people among us who ought to know better, and who go to gipsies and mediums to have their fortunes told, as they call it, and to find out where things are gone to, which have been lost or stolen. This is very foolish, I say; but that is not all, it is also very wicked, for it is asking human crea





tures to do what can only be done by God himself, who alone knows all things, and such things as they would know.

Saul knew that it was wicked to go to this woman, for he had even cut off some people for professing her art, according to God's command in the last verse of the twentieth chapter of Leviticus—"A man also or woman that hath a familiar spirit, or that is a wizard (or fortune-teller), shall surely be put to death: they shall stone them with stones: their blood shall be upon them."

Saul, however, found out by his servants, that one of these witches lived at a place called Endor, a city not far from Gilboa. So he disguised himself and put on other clothes than he usually wore,—perhaps made himself look like a countryman or common soldier,—and, taking two men with him, he went by night to the house of the witch.

The woman knew that Saul had been very severe against such people as herself, and was afraid that this was only a scheme to ensnare her and so inform against her, and she told Saul what she thought. This ought to have made him ashamed of himself, when he remembered that he had put others to death for doing what he was tempting this woman to do, and that he was breaking his own and the divine law. He might also have supposed that if the woman could not tell that he was Saul,—though in disguise,—she was not very likely to tell what would happen to him, or to know whether he would beat the Philistines or not. But his heart was hardened, and his mind was as dark as the night.

Saul then made a solemn oath, in the name of the Lord, that she should not be in any danger from what she might say and do.

On this promise the woman proceeded, and she asked Saul whose spirit she should bring from the other world. And Saul said, Samuel's. She then pretended to bring up Samuel, and by the king's asking for his old friend the prophet, and it might be by some words that dropped from his attendants, or some marks of peculiar respect, or even some previous knowledge of the king's person, her keen eye cunningly found out who he was, and she cried out, "Why hast thou deceived me, for thou art Saul?" Then she told the king what she saw,—that she saw gods ascending out of the earth, and that Samuel's appearance was like that of an





old man covered with a mantle, a thing which all Israel must have known, for Samuel was a very public man, both as a prophet and a ruler.

Then by what the woman said, Saul perceived that it was Samuel; not that he saw him, but he took her word, and he bowed in token of respect to the supposed Samuel.*

Then the woman spoke in a feigned voice,—or some one concealed close by spoke for her,—and said to Saul, as if Samuel was speaking, “Why hast thou disquieted me to bring me up?” Now the blessed Samuel was with God, and could not be disquieted; but she pretended that he spoke, and Saul, in his fright and weakness of mind, thought that he did, and he asked him what he should do about the Philistines.

You remember that Balaam was a wicked man, and a sooth-sayer, or fortune-teller, like this woman, and that nevertheless God forced him to prophesy some good things about Israel, when he wanted to curse, that he might get a reward offered to him by Balak, King of Moab, for so doing. So, in this case, it is most likely that the witch, who was afraid of Saul, would rather have encouraged him and sent him away pleased, but she was obliged to submit to a divine impulse; and so still carrying on the pretence that it was Samuel who spoke, and in this way throwing off the blame from herself, she really did foretell what was to happen to Saul on the morrow, which she could not have done if God had not informed her mind, as a warning to the sinful king. She told him, that because he had not executed God's sentence against Amalek, on the morrow he should be conquered by the Philis-

* The author is perhaps here called to justify to the instructors of the young reader the view he has taken of this chapter. He is aware that he has differed from all commentators that he has seen, their opinions being either that Samuel really appeared, or that Satan appeared in his shape; but he can neither believe that the spirit of Samuel could be “disquieted” after his departure, and that by a witch,—nor that Satan would be allowed to assume the appearance of a prophet of the Most High. Besides, a careful reading of the whole, divested of former impressions, will clearly show that *Saul did not see Samuel*, and in the agitation of the moment he was unable to ascertain if it really were his voice or not that spoke to him: it was enough for his credulity that it was *pretended* to be so. On this point he has enlarged in an extra note in his *EVANGELICAL SYNOPSIS*: and being fully persuaded in his own mind, that there have been great mistakes upon it, he would persuade the young reader also that all that is recorded of Samuel's rising, was nothing but a *pretence on the part of the witch*. He likewise begs an attentive perusal of his remarks here introduced for the help of the young.





tines, his sons should be slain, and Israel fall into the hands of their enemies.

Saul was so frightened that he dropped down, for he was very weary and faint, not having eaten bread all the day, nor all the night.

Then the woman told him she was not to blame, and hoped he would not punish her, and she urged him to eat something ; but he refused, till his servants at last joined the woman in compelling him ; and perhaps in so doing she had a more certain pledge of her safety, after he had condescended to partake of her hospitality.

Therefore, after having eaten of a fatted calf which she dressed, and some unleavened bread that she made for him, Saul and his servants went away.

THE TWENTY-NINTH CHAPTER OF I. SAMUEL.

David's march along with the Philistines.

“And the lords of the Philistines passed on by hundreds and by thousands : but David and his men passed on in the rereward with Achish.”—Ver. 2.

The Philistines having drawn up their armies near the city of Aphek, the Israelites pitched in the valley of Jezreel. And the Philistines marched under their captains, some commanding hundreds, and others thousands. David also marched with the Philistines, and was the commander of the body-guard of Achish, who greatly confided in him. He must now have been in a great strait, for he could not fight against Israel without becoming an ally with wicked idolaters, and a foe to his own country ; nor could he desert to the Israelites, for he would then have thrown himself into the hands of the revengeful Saul, and have proved a traitor to the hospitable Achish ; nor could he quit his post and go back, without at least exposing himself to the charge of cowardice. What was he then to do ? I am sure he must have





been sorely perplexed if the minds of the Philistine lords had not been moved to work his deliverance. They were jealous of David, and they could not forget his cutting off the head of Goliath of Gath, so that they were very wroth with Achish for trusting him. And they said, "Make this fellow return, that he may go again to his place which thou hast appointed him, and let him not go down with us to battle, lest in the battle he be an adversary to us: for wherewith should he reconcile himself to his master?—should it not be with the heads of these men? Is not this David, of whom they sang one to another in dances, saying, Saul slew his thousands, and David his ten thousands?"

Achish was afraid of offending his lords, so he spoke very kindly to David, and told him to go back, and he gave him a very high character, which we should remember, because it is such an one as we should try to obtain: "Surely, as the Lord liveth, thou hast been upright, and thy going out and thy coming in with me in the host is good in my sight; for I have not found evil in thee, since the day of thy coming unto me, unto this day: nevertheless, the lords favour thee not."

David was no doubt glad enough in his heart at what Achish said, but he pretended to leave him with reluctance. It is not at all consistent with a good man to pretend to anything; he should always be sincere.

However, David got out of his scrape; he ought not to have got into it at all. God would have protected him as he had before done, had he continued, according to the order of the prophet Gad, in the land of Judah, but by going over to the Philistines, he had nearly got into greater difficulties.

It was kind in God so to order it, that he was not allowed in any way to disgrace himself in this battle; and he might learn in future, that it was dangerous to form any close alliance with the enemies of God.





THE THIRTIETH CHAPTER OF I. SAMUEL.

The Amalekites having plundered, and burnt Ziklag, are pursued and slain by David.

‘And it came to pass when David and his men were come to Ziklag on the third day, that the Amalekites had invaded the south, and Ziklag, and smitten Ziklag, and burned it with fire.”—Ver. 1.

Besides delivering him out of his difficulty in fighting with or deserting Achish, David's enemies had been the means of sending him back to Ziklag at a very important moment. For while he was absent, some of the Amalekites who yet remained in their land, went to avenge themselves upon him by plundering and burning the city which he had left unguarded, and they carried away all the women and children, and David's two wives were among them.

David and his men were so grieved that they wept bitterly, until they could weep no more. And to add to his trouble, his soldiers began to murmur at him for having made the Amalekites such enemies, and for leaving the city unguarded, and so bringing them all to misery and ruin, when poor David was as great a sufferer, and in some respects a greater sufferer than the rest.

David in his trouble knew where to go for help, and so he asked counsel of God by means of the priest's ephod with the Urim. And God encouraged him to pursue the enemy. So all the six hundred men made all speed after them. But when they reached the brook Besor, two hundred were so faint and weary—having marched so far, first from the camp of the Philistines to Ziklag, and then from Ziklag to the brook—that they could go no further; David however continued to pursue the enemy with four hundred men.

As they passed along, not knowing exactly which way to go, David's men found an Egyptian lying ill upon the road; and they took him to David, “and they gave him a piece of cake of figs,





and two clusters of raisins," and the poor fellow revived a little, for he had had nothing to eat for three days and three nights.

Then David questioned him, to know how he came there,—for he probably suspected he knew something of the Amalekite army. And he told him that he was an Egyptian, a servant to an Amalekite, and that he had fallen sick upon the road, and his master had cruelly left him behind. And that they had been plundering the Philistines, and part of Saul's dominions, and David's city of Ziklag; having no doubt taken advantage of the absence of all the men of war from these places, who were met for the grand battle between Israel and the Philistines.

David then thought he could perhaps tell which way the Amalekites were gone, and he asked him if he could show him the way. The poor fellow said that he would very readily do so, if he would promise not to kill him, and if he would not give him up again to his master, for he had had such a proof of his cruelty, that he could not bear to think of ever returning to him. When he was so sick and ill he had left him to perish alone, when he might easily have placed him on a camel and taken care of him, and carried him away.

However, God permitted him to leave this young man as a guide for David; and he took him to the spot where the Amalekites were encamped, having most likely been told where he would find his master if he should happen to revive.

"And when he had brought him down, behold, they were spread abroad upon all the earth, eating and drinking, and dancing, because of all the great spoil that they had taken out of the land of the Philistines, and out of the land of Judah."—And David fell suddenly upon them, when they were quite unprepared to fight, and perhaps many were wearied and intoxicated; and out of a large army, only four hundred young men escaped, who rode off on camels, or swift dromedaries used in those parts,—while David recovered every thing that he had lost, and his wives, and all the families of his men, and they got all the flocks and herds of the Amalekites, which they drove before the other cattle that had been taken from Ziklag; and they gave David the honour of bravely taking them, and said, "This is David's spoil."





And David hastened back to the two hundred men left at the brook Besor : and they hastened to meet David and to give him joy on his victory, while he as kindly inquired after their health and welfare.

But there were some men of Belial,—or surly and selfish men in David's army,—who wished David to give the two hundred nothing but their wives and children who had been carried away, and thought that as they had not been in the battle, they had no right to any spoil.

David gently reasoned with these men, and told them that God had given them the victory, and they should not be so covetous, for the others had done their part,—and if they had been too weary to march further, yet they had watched their baggage, and if he had been defeated, these must have equally been sufferers. And he determined that in future all his army should equally share in the spoils taken from the enemy.

Besides this, he very generously sent some to the elders of Judah, who had been kind to him, and to those places in Judah which had been plundered, and various other places, “and to all the places where David himself and his men were wont to haunt,” when he was in Judah ; and so he showed that he had a grateful remembrance of those who sheltered and relieved him in the times of his distress.

THE THIRTY-FIRST CHAPTER OF I. SAMUEL.

Saul defeated and slain by the Philistines.

‘Now the Philistines fought against Israel : and the men of Israel fled before the Philistines, and fell down slain in Mount Gilboa.’—Ver. 1.

The day of recompense is now come, in which Saul must account for the blood of the Amalekites which he had sinfully spared, and that of the priests which he had more sinfully spilt ; and that of David, which he would have spilt, must come into the account.

Israel seems to have fled at the first onset. Jonathan, Abinadab,





and Melchi-shua, three of Saul's sons, were the first among the slain, for the Philistines pressed hard to slay Saul himself, whom they seem bravely to have defended while he escaped.

But, alas, here is good Jonathan among the slain! Duty to his father obliged him to engage in this conflict against the Philistines; and, indeed, he loved his country, and could not bear to see it invaded by that wicked people. Well, God so ordered it, that Jonathan did not see the misery which the sins of his father had brought upon his family and upon all Israel; and by his death, the way to the throne was made open for David; but yet, when the righteous perisheth, and when Jonathan is seen falling under a conquering Philistine, it is a matter of grief.

Still pursuing Saul, "the archers hit him," and finding himself wounded, he did not like to fall alive into the hands of the Philistines, and so he ordered his armour-bearer to thrust him through. But the armour-bearer was afraid; so Saul took a sword and fell upon it, and thus became his own murderer. His armour-bearer seeing he had slain himself, then in despair "fell likewise upon his sword, and died with him. So Saul died, and his three sons, and his armour-bearer, and all his men that same day together."

The Jews report that Saul's armour-bearer was the wicked Doeg, who killed the priests; and if so, it was indeed remarkable that Saul and he should perish so together, and perhaps both by Doeg's own sword which he had used on that shocking occasion.

The day after the battle the Philistines went and stripped the bodies of the dead, and having found those of Saul and his three sons, they cut off his head, and they stripped him of his armour, and sent it to be set up as a trophy of their victory in the house of Ashtarothe, their goddess; this was an idol which Israel had often shamefully worshipped, and now their king whom they had desired, was made a subject of contempt before it. And the Philistines sent all over their country to give public notice of their victory, and to give thanks to their gods. They also fastened Saul's body, and the bodies of his sons, to the wall of Bethshan, a city that lay not far from Gilboa, and very near to the river Jordan. Hither the dead bodies were dragged, and here hung up





in chains to be devoured by the beasts of prey ; so that, though Saul slew himself to avoid being abused by the Philistines, his sinful deed did not save him, for never was dead body more abused.

Little more than the river Jordan lay between Bethshan and Jabesh-gilead, and Jordan was in that place passable by its fords. The valiant men of the city therefore made a bold attempt, and passing the river in the night, took down the dead bodies that they might decently bury them. They did this because they could not endure to see the crown of Israel so profaned by the wicked Philistines, and because,—as you must recollect,—Saul did them a great kindness when he first came to the throne,—as we have seen in the eleventh chapter—where he saved them from a disgraceful surrender to Nahash the king of the Ammonites, and from having their right eyes thrust out.

Having got the bodies, the putrid flesh was burnt, and the bones were buried under a tree, and, in token of sorrow, they fasted seven days ; not that they ate and drank nothing all the time, but they fasted every day till evening, according to a custom among the Jews.

Thus ends the reign of Saul, and we learn by it that those who live and do wickedly, must expect in the end to die miserably, and that a man's greatness will not save him from being punished for his sins.





THE SECOND BOOK OF SAMUEL,

OTHERWISE CALLED

THE SECOND BOOK OF KINGS:

OR THE HISTORY OF THE REIGN OF KING DAVID.

Execution of the Amalekite who slew Saul.

"And David said unto the young man that told him, Whence art thou? And he answered, I am the son of a stranger, an Amalekite.

"And David said unto him, How wast thou not afraid to stretch forth thine hand to destroy the Lord's anointed?"—Chap. i. 13, 14.

IN the thirtieth chapter of the book we have just finished, you will remember to have read of David's returning to Ziklag, his own city, after the slaughter of the Amalekites, who had plundered and set fire to it while he was absent.

On the third day after the battle was fought with the Philistines, in which Saul and Jonathan were slain, a man arrived at Ziklag from the camp of Saul, "with his clothes rent, and earth upon his head," which were his marks of mourning.

And he told David about the battle, and that he was passing by the spot on Mount Gilboa, where Saul, being wounded, was leaning upon his spear; and that "the chariots and horsemen,"





if the Philistines followed hard after him ; that he asked him of what country he was, and he told him he was an Amalekite ; and he desired the man to stand on him and slay him, for though wounded he might fall alive into the hands of the cruel Philistines ; and so the man slew him, and took his crown or chaplet from his head, and his bracelet, an ornament which military men of that country used to wear on the wrist, and which was probably made of gold ; and he brought them to David in proof that Saul was really dead.

You are, perhaps, ready to suppose that David was quite pleased to learn that his persecuting enemy was dead, and that he himself should now become king in his stead. But David was better taught than to show a malicious spirit, and, instead of rejoicing, he rent his clothes as a proof of his grief at what had happened : and he and his men “fasted until even, for Saul and for Jonathan his son, and for the people of the land,” who had fallen in the unfortunate battle, “and for the house of Israel,” who would now be a derision to their mortal enemies the Philistines.

No doubt the man expected some great reward, and was not a little surprised to see David's grief. But the affair did not end here. David had always been very tender of Saul's life as the Lord's anointed, and you know that when he might have been avenged on him, he never would hurt him. Now, this man said that he had killed him, and though he might plead that he did it at his request, yet that was no excuse, for it would be very wicked in you or me to kill any one, if he desired it. So David said, “Thy blood be upon thy head ; for thy mouth hath testified against thee, saying, I have slain the Lord's anointed.” And, at David's command, one of the young men fell upon him, and smote him that he died.

This man was also an Amalekite, of which David had assured himself by asking him to say it a second time, and the people of this nation, being very wicked, were all sentenced by their Maker to be put to death.

The man's story is, however, not believed by many, as it does not agree with the account of Saul's death given in the former chapter, and as he was not consistent in all he said. You recollect





that there Saul is said to have killed himself, but this man said that he it was who killed him. Then he said that Saul told him, his life was whole in him, and yet he was sure that he could not live after he was fallen, and so he slew him. From these contradictions, it is supposed that the man really told a lie to David—that he happened to find the body of Saul dead on the field after he had killed himself—that he then took the crown and bracelets from him, and carried them to David, and—to make his merit appear greater—told him that his was the hand that gave the king the final blow. David knew not then but that all this was true, and so he caused him to be executed; thus you see what he got by lying. Had he never thought of this lie, and gone to David with it, he might probably have escaped and been saved.

This chapter concludes with an elegy, or funeral song, which David wrote on the death of Saul and Jonathan.

THE SECOND CHAPTER OF II. SAMUEL.

Battle between Abner and Joab.

“And there was a very sore battle that day: and Abner was beaten, and the men of Israel, before the servants of David.”—
Ver. 17.

Saul being dead, David—having before been anointed king—inquired of the Lord if he should go up to the cities of Judah, and God directed his way, and told him to go up to Hebron. So he took his wives and his friends and followers and went up. “And the men of Judah came, and there they anointed David king over the house of Judah.”

“But Abner the son of Ner, captain of Saul’s host, took Ish-bosheth the son of Saul, and brought him over to Mahanaim;” and he made him king over Israel. And when he had reigned two years, he was then forty years of age. So David was only king of Judah in Hebron, while Ish-bosheth reigned, which was during seven years and a half.





Abner being the chief general of Ish-bosheth's troops, resolved to lead them out and fight against David; and Joab, the son of Zeruiah, a sister of David, and David's commander, went out with his men, and "they met together by the pool of Gibeon: and they sat down, the one on the one side of the pool, and the other on the other side of the pool," and so they watched each other's motions.

Abner now gave a challenge to Joab, and said, "Let the young men now arise and play before us." What do you suppose this play was?—why, he meant that a few of them should fight with their swords, to show who could most quickly kill his opponent. This was an ancient custom, and such fighters were known among the Romans under the name of gladiators.

Joab accepted of this challenge, and twelve men of the tribe of Benjamin met twelve of the tribe of Judah. "And they caught every one his fellow by the head, and thrust his sword in his fellow's side, so they fell down together;" they were equally strong and brave, and as none would yield the whole twenty-four perished! So the place was called Helkath-hazzurim, which signifies *the field of rocky men*, or mighty men, who stood as immovable as a rock, and would not yield, but died fighting on the spot.

Was not this cruel, to let twenty-four fine men kill one another in this way? And yet this is not half so wicked, as to send whole armies to fight against each other, and kill one another, when they never did any thing to offend one another in their lives; yet if you read the histories of nations, you will find that this has often been done by tyrants, only to serve their own ambition, and take a few towns or cities from their weaker neighbours.

The whole of the armies next engaged, and Abner,—who had proposed the cruel play,—was routed and obliged to run for his life.

Among David's officers were his three nephews, Joab, and Abishai, and Asahel. And Asahel was a famous runner, and "as light of foot as a wild roe." He was resolved either to kill Abner or take him prisoner, and so, perhaps, end the war at once. So he passed by all others and pursued after him. Abner, though obliged to flee, was yet a bold soldier, and he knew that he could vanquish Asahel, for though he might be swifter than he, he was





not stronger, and perhaps not so skilful. He therefore warned Asahel to go back, and fight with some others and not with him, and as he knew Joab, who was a valiant man, would never forget to avenge Asahel's death if he killed him, he was yet the more loath to do it. But Asahel did not mind Abner, and at length coming up close to him, and perhaps being just about to kill him, Abner suddenly thrust the hinder part of his spear into him—it being probably sharp at both ends—and as it went quite through him, he instantly fell dead.

At length Abner collected his troops on the top of a hill, and he called out to Joab, as he was still advancing, "Shall the sword devour for ever?—knowest thou not that it will be bitterness in the end? How long shall it be then ere thou bid the people return from following their brethren?" Joab was the conqueror, but he listened to his reasonable language, yet not without justly reproaching him that he had challenged to the battle, and begun the war in the morning. The maker of mischief is very often the first to suffer by his own folly, and Abner paid dearly for his cruel proposal that the young men should play. I do not like to see young folks play at soldiers at all—we should never imitate bad things, and fighting at best is always a bad thing. I had rather see them with a book than a wooden sword, and with a whistle than a drum.

"So Joab blew a trumpet, and all the people stood still, and pursued after Israel no more, neither fought they any more."

In this battle Joab lost twenty of David's men, including Asahel, but Abner lost three hundred and sixty men. Asahel, being a great man, was buried in a sepulchre at Bethlehem, and the rest on the field of battle.





THE THIRD CHAPTER OF II. SAMUEL.

The Murder of Abner by Joab.

“And the king lamented over Abner, and said, Died Abner as a fool dieth?”

“Thy hands were not bound, nor thy feet put into fetters: as a man falleth before wicked men, so fellest thou.”—Vers. 33, 34.

“Now there was long war between the house of Saul and the house of David,” for, as before observed, David reigned in Hebron only, for more than seven years, while Ish-bosheth continued king over Israel. “But David waxed” or grew “stronger and stronger, and the house of Saul waxed weaker and weaker;” David’s troops continually gaining the advantage over those of the house of Saul, which became gradually fewer, and perhaps less disposed for battle when they were sure to be beaten.

At length a quarrel took place between Abner and Ish-bosheth the king of Israel. Abner had visited one of the concubines or inferior wives of Saul, who survived him, and who, like the women in the east in such cases, was shut up from the eyes of men. Such an act was proof of a great liberty, and was generally considered as a first step towards aiming to get the throne. So Ish-bosheth reproved Abner for what he had done, to let him know that he was not unacquainted with his proceedings.

Abner neither confessed nor denied the charge, but as he had raised Ish-bosheth to the throne, when the people were expecting it to become David’s, he having been anointed for it—he was very angry at the king for reproving him, and he threatened that he would no longer serve him, but give up the kingdom to David, for whom God had designed it. And Abner, having great authority, and the command of all the troops, Ish-bosheth was afraid of him, and said no more.

However, Abner did not forget his threat, but—while he was yet angry—he sent messengers to David to make a league or covenant with him, that he would forget all that had passed and





become friends, and he would bring over all Israel to him. David readily agreed, but as the first terms of the covenant, he required Abner to get his wife Michal, Saul's daughter, restored to him, whom Saul had separated from David, and given for a wife to Phaltiel the son of Laish. This could, however, only be done most readily through the permission of Ish-bosheth, who was Michal's brother. So Abner, having probably agreed to forward David's object, David sent messengers to Ish-bosheth to restore Michal to him, and Ish-bosheth sent and took her from her husband, who went after her weeping as far as Bahurim, a city of the tribe of Benjamin, when he was ordered back by Abner.

Then Abner met the elders or chiefs of Israel, and told them that he knew they formerly wished to have David for their king, and if they would now have him, he would not oppose them. His next step was to gather together the people of the tribe of Benjamin, to which he belonged, and over which he had much influence; and as Saul was of that tribe, he desired to gain their consent, that they might not afterwards trouble David.

Having settled matters agreeably to his wishes, Abner took twenty men with him, who were probably leaders in Israel, and they went to David at Hebron. Here, according to the custom of the times, David made a feast for them in token of harmony, and so the affair was settled.

Nothing now remained but that all Israel should be made acquainted with what Abner and the chiefs had done, and he went home to gather them together, to swear allegiance to David as their king.

While these things were taking place, Joab, David's commander-in-chief, happened to be out with some soldiers, pursuing a troop of wild plunderers, still common in the East, and having beaten them, he returned with great spoil.

When he found that Abner had seen David, and that acts of friendship had passed between them, he was very much mortified; for he was, most likely, afraid lest Abner, who was a very fine officer, should become a favourite with David after raising him to the throne of Israel, and he was perhaps aware that David did not very cordially love him, as he was a haughty and overbearing man.





So he said to David—which was a very impudent way of addressing his king—"What hast thou done? behold Abner came unto thee; why is it that thou hast sent him away, and he is quite gone? Thou knowest Abner the son of Ner, that he came to deceive thee, and to know thy going out, and thy coming in, and to know all that thou doest;" intimating that he was only a spy, and meant nothing sincere in all he had said and done.

Then, unknown to David, he sent messengers after Abner, and they got him to return. And Joab waited for him at the gate of Hebron, and called him aside, as if to speak to him about something secret and important, and then stabbed him under the fifth rib, which was in the same place in which he had stabbed Asahel, Joab's brother, and he pretended that for that cause only he had slain him—"for the blood of Asahel his brother."

Now Asahel had fallen in war, and Abner had unwillingly killed him, to save his own life; but this act of Joab was most treacherous, and was nothing less than deliberate murder. When, therefore, David heard of it, he was much grieved, and he said, "I and my kingdom are guiltless before the Lord for ever from the blood of Abner, the son of Ner; let it rest on the head of Joab and on all his father's house," for though Joab's hand had done the cruel deed, his brethren had no doubt some share in urging him on to do it. And in his indignation, David, to show his horror at the crime, wished that Joab's house might be afflicted with a number of diseases, or fall by the sword in war, or perish for want of bread.

Though Joab did what was base and criminal in this affair, yet we may see in it the just judgment of God; for, by raising Ish-bosheth to the throne of Israel, Abner had opposed the designs of God, which he knew; and he had been the cause of all the wars which had so long existed between the house of Saul and the house of David, in which much blood had been shed; and his conduct at the last, towards Ish-bosheth, was exceedingly treacherous and vile. Thus you see how God can punish the wicked even in this world. He often lets bad men take their own course, and they both punish themselves and each other.

David, however, looked only at Joab's crime, which was dis-





graceful to Judah. And he ordered Joab to rend his clothes, and gird on sackcloth, and mourn before Abner. And he himself followed the bier on which he was carried to the tomb. It was not usual for kings, as the Jews say, to attend a funeral, to go out of the doors of the palace after their own dead, and much less others; but David did this to satisfy the people, and to root out of their mind all suspicion of his having any hand in Abner's death, and to show that he was not slain by his will, or with his consent.

"And they buried Abner in Hebron: and the king lifted up his voice and wept at the grave of Abner: and all the people wept." They were all grieved at the treachery of Joab, which was likely to bring dishonour upon them—for nothing is more base than treachery—and the tears of David moved them also to tears.

Then the king pronounced an elegy over Abner's grave, which you have read at the head of this chapter, "Died Abner as the fool dieth?" meaning that he did not die like the foolish infatuated malefactor who had broken the laws of his country; he was never thrown into prison and fettered, but he had fallen by the hands of blood-thirsty and deceitful men.

After this, David fasted for some time; and he told his courtiers, as a reason for his conduct, that Abner was a prince and a great man,—for he was one of the royal family of Israel, his father was Saul's uncle, and he his own cousin; and as he was a great general, and skilful in state affairs, and was likely to restore peace to all Israel and Judah, his loss was that of a man which would be greatly felt, and was therefore much to be deplored.—But he himself was weak, though anointed king; the sons of his sister Zeruiah,—that is, Joab and Abishai—were too hard for him, and he could not venture to punish them, lest they should cause a rebellion;—however they would not escape at last, for "the Lord shall reward the doer of evil according to his wickedness."





THE FOURTH CHAPTER OF II. SAMUEL.

The Murder of Ish-bosheth.

"And the sons of Rimmon the Beerothite, Rechab and Baanah, went, and came about the heat of the day to the house of Ish-bosheth, who lay on a bed at noon.

"And they came thither into the midst of the house, as though they would have fetched wheat; and they smote him under the fifth rib; and Rechab, and Baanah his brother escaped."—Vers. 5, 6.

Ish-bosheth having lost his great captain, Abner, was in a state of much alarm, "his hands were feeble," for probably he had no commander so brave and skilful as he was.

While he was in this state of agitation, and all the Israelites too, two of his captains, Rechab and Baanah his brother, conspired to kill him.

Perhaps they thought that they should be justified in this deed, as Ish-bosheth had no right to the throne, even though he was a son of Saul; for there was a son of Jonathan—his elder brother—alive, whose name was Mephibosheth. This son was five years old, and under the care of a nurse when Saul and Jonathan were slain; she then, fearing for his safety, fled with him from the royal palace in Gibeah, where she thought the Philistines might come and kill him, and in her haste let him fall, and hurt his feet so much that he became a cripple. He must now have been about twelve years old.

In hot countries, people, and especially the rich, always take rest during the violent heat at noon. This was the time fixed upon by these wicked men to execute their evil purpose. So they went to the house of Ish-bosheth at the hour when he was resting, and appeared to go in to fetch wheat for themselves, their cattle and men, the king's granaries being there; and having entered his apartment, they smote him under the fifth rib, and then, hav-





ing cut off his head, they escaped with it and took it to David, who, it is reckoned, was sixty-eight miles from Ish-bosheth's residence.

And now they presented the head in triumph, and said to David, "Behold the head of Ish-bosheth the son of Saul thine enemy, which sought thy life; and the Lord hath avenged my lord the king this day of Saul, and of his seed," hoping by these words to make their present the more agreeable to the king.

But David told the murderers how he had served the Amalekite who brought him tidings that he had killed Saul; and, as Ish-bosheth was innocent of any crime towards them, and was resting on his bed unsuspecting of any such guilty men approaching him, they were still more guilty, and had acted as traitors towards him; and so, as a just punishment, David commanded them to be slain; and their hands and feet to be cut off and hung up in public, as a warning to others against doing the like cruel and treacherous deeds.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER OF II. SAMUEL.

David King over all Israel.

"So all the elders came to the king to Hebron, and King David made a league with them in Hebron before the Lord: and they anointed David king over all Israel."—Ver. 3.

Ish-bosheth and Abner being dead, the tribes of Israel resolved at once to make David their king.

So all the elders went to Hebron, and David made a league or agreement with them, promising to do them justice on his part, while they promised to obey him on theirs. He had been anointed by Samuel as God's chosen king, and again as king of Judah, and now a third time as king of all Israel.

At this time he was thirty-seven years and a half old, having reigned in Hebron from the age of thirty; after this "he reigned thirty and three years over all Israel and Judah," making in the whole forty years' reign.





After David was anointed king, his first exploit was to gain Jerusalem out of the hand of the Jebusites,—the inhabitants of the land,—that city being given to the tribe of Benjamin, but they had never wholly made themselves masters of it.

Now the walls were very strong, and when David appeared before them the Jebusites laughed at him, and placed some blind and lame men on them, or what we call invalids, or worn-out and crippled soldiers. Then they told him, jeeringly, that these were enough to defend them against his army, and till he could take them, he could never get into their city.

So David promised to make him captain who should find his way through a secret passage for water, by which he might get at the lame and blind, or invalids, and smite them for their insolence, for they had said,—even the lame and the blind,—he shall not come into the house, or set his foot in any habitation.

David, however, conquered these boasters, and dwelt in the fort, and called it the city of David.

This was the city which afterwards became so famous, where the Temple was built, and where the family of David was fixed.

And David built many buildings round about a spot called Millo.

Hiram, king of Tyre, also sent to congratulate him on his accession to the throne, and as Hiram's subjects were better architects than the Israelites, they were employed in building David a palace suited to his exalted station.

It was then a custom for kings to strengthen alliances or friendships, by marrying many wives from great families, and David also did so.

The Philistines were, however, jealous of the union of Judah and Israel, and fearing that David might grow too powerful for them, they made haste to march their armies against him.

So David asked of God to direct him, and God said unto him, "Go up; for I will doubtless deliver the Philistines into thine hand."

And David smote the Philistines; and in memory of his victory, he called the name of the place Baal-perazim, which means, *the plain of breaches*, because there the Lord had broken forth





upon his enemies, just like the overwhelming waters of a flood, and destroyed them.

Notwithstanding their defeat, the Philistines again came with their armies, and pitched in the same place as before. Again David asked counsel of God, and he was commanded to march behind them, and there should be a rustling among the leaves of some mulberry-trees, which when he heard, he was to fall upon the rear of the Philistines,—who would probably not hear the movement of the Israelites on account of that of the trees,—and so the Philistines would easily be overcome, the arm of the Almighty helping Israel against their foes.

“And David did so, as the Lord had commanded him, and smote the Philistines from Geba” to Gazer; or from Gibeon, which was the same place, and a city in the tribe of Benjamin, to Gazer, a city which was on the borders of the Philistines, and about eighteen miles from the spot where the battle was fought.

THE SIXTH AND SEVENTH CHAPTERS OF II. SAMUEL.

Removal of the Ark and solemn Death of Uzzah.

“And David arose, and went with all the people that were with him from Baale of Judah, to bring up from thence the ark of God.”—Chap. vi. 2.

The ark had remained for fifty years at Kirjath-jearim, the place to which it was taken when it was fetched from Beth-shemesh, excepting that Saul once had it at Gibeah.

David now resolved that it should be near him in his chief city, for it was the sign of God's presence, and on that he relied for protection. So he took thirty thousand choice men to guard it. And he brought it from Baale of Judah, another name for Kirjath-jearim, the place where it was.

“And they set the ark of God upon a new cart, and brought it out of the house of Abinadab that was in Gibeah,” a part of the





city of Baale, so called ;—"and Uzzah and Ahio the sons of Abinadab, drove the new cart."

Now the command originally given for carrying the ark was, that it should be borne upon men's shoulders, and those men should be Levites only of the family of Kohath, to whom no wagons were given for carrying sacred materials—so that putting the ark into a cart was forgetting the command of God. This seemed a little mistake, but little mistakes are serious things in religion, and often lead to bad consequences, and so it turned out here.

The ark moved forward, and David, and all the house of Israel, played on a number of musical instruments to express their joy. But when they came to Nachon's threshing-floor, "Uzzah put forth his hand to the ark of God and took hold of it ;" to keep it from falling, "for the oxen shook it. And the anger of the Lord was kindled against Uzzah, and God smote him there for his error ; and there he died by the ark of God." So David ever after called the place Perez-uzzah, or the breach of Uzzah.

You will wonder what crime Uzzah committed in only trying to keep the ark steady : but, it was forbidden to touch the ark on pain of death, and the priests were to carry it on staves only, and not to put their hands to it. It was a token of God's presence with the people, and he would not therefore have it treated lightly. But this act of Uzzah's was too familiar, and his punishment teaches us how very solemnly we ought always to behave in every thing belonging to religion ; "for God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints, and to be had in reverence of all them that are about him."

David was frightened at this judgment, and lest he should further err, he resolved to leave the ark, and wait further directions from God before he attempted to take it to Jerusalem. So he carried it aside to the house of one Obed-edom, who was one of the Levites, and it remained under his care three months ; "and the Lord blessed Obed-edom and all his household."

Obed-edom prospered so greatly that every body talked about him, and the news of his success came to the ears of David. This encouraged him to try further and get the ark nearer to him.





"So David went and brought up the ark of God from the house of Obed-edom, in the city of David, with gladness." Having learnt that none but the Levites of the family of Kohath ought to carry the ark, he had it now borne in a proper manner, and when they who bare it had gone six steps, "he sacrificed oxen and fatlings," to express gratitude to God, and to atone for the former error.

On this occasion David laid aside the distinctions of royalty and put on a linen ephod; and he danced sacred dances, or expressed his joy by dancing movements before the ark, while the people shouted and the trumpets sounded.

As the procession entered David's city, Michal, Saul's daughter, looked through a window in the palace to see it, it being very grand; and when she saw David "leaping and dancing before the Lord, she despised him in her heart," thinking that he acted a mean part, and unworthy of his dignity. Michal, though Saul's daughter, does not seem to have had any religion, and it is no uncommon thing for irreligious people now to despise those that are religious.

So the ark was brought and set in its place, "and David offered burnt-offerings and peace-offerings before the Lord," and having blessed the people and given them refreshment, he "returned to bless his household."

"And Michal the daughter of Saul came out to meet David," and she sneered at him, "and said, How glorious was the king of Israel to-day, who uncovered himself to-day in the eyes of the handmaids of his servants," stripping off his royal robes, "as one of the vain fellows shamelessly uncovereth himself?"

But David was not to be laughed out of his piety, and he said if this was to be vile, he would yet be more vile; if he had danced and praised God before the ark, he was ready to do so again; and while he exalted God and humbled himself, he was sure that God would exalt him before all his household.

Those who ridicule religion and the servants of God, will bring upon themselves disgrace in the end. Michal, the daughter of Saul, never became a mother, which among the women of Israel, who hoped each that the promised Messiah should spring from them, was an extremely great mortification. "Them that honour





God, he will honour, but those that despise him and his servants' service, shall be lightly esteemed.

After this, when David was at rest and sitting in the house which Hiram's servants had built for him, David spoke to Nathan the prophet, and told him that he did not feel satisfied to dwell in a fine house of cedar, while the ark of God dwelt only under a tent, for it had no other covering. And Nathan advised him to do what he wished, and prepare a better place for it. But God made known his mind to Nathan that same night, and told him to prevent David from building the new habitation for the ark, for he had never desired it; but as he approved of every good desire, he would build up David's house, meaning that his family should prosper—and he would establish his throne; and his son, who should reign after him, should build him a house for the ark.

And David was very grateful to God for his kind promises, and contented to leave building the house, since he commanded it, and he offered up a fine prayer to God, closing it with this petition,—and none of us can ask God for any thing better,—“And with thy blessing let the house of thy servant be blessed for ever.” This prayer you will find in the seventh chapter, with which it ends.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER OF II. SAMUEL.

David's Conquests.

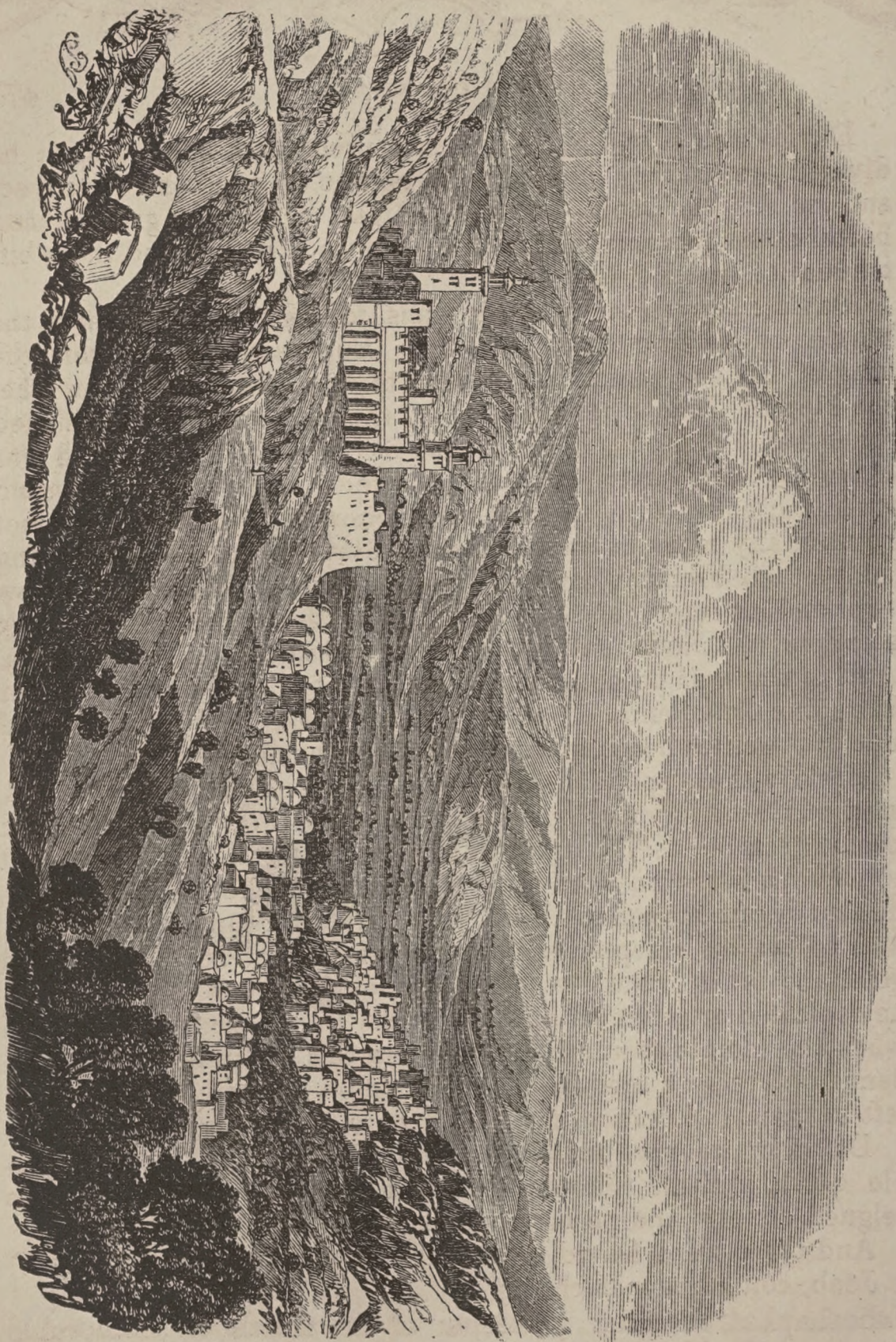
“Of Syria and of Moab, and of the children of Ammon, and of the Philistines.”—Ver. 12.

The Philistines had long been great enemies to Israel. Samson weakened them, Samuel and Saul also contended with them, and now David makes an entire conquest of them; and he “took Megiddah,” which is supposed to have been an eminence on which Gath was built, that place so famous on account of Goliath.



RETURN OF DAVID TO HIS KINGDOM





HEBRON.



David also smote Moab and measured them with a line ; he divided the country into three parts, two of which he destroyed, and he left the people of the third part to till the ground, and become the servants of Israel. Thus he also subdued these bitter foes of Israel.

David likewise smote the Syrians, for as he went to settle the border of his kingdom at the river Euphrates, Hadadezer, the king of Zobah—which was a part of Syria—opposed him ; he, the king of Zobah, having some of the land which God designed for Israel. And in the battle the Syrians lost “a thousand war chariots ;” and seven hundred horsemen, and twenty thousand footmen ; and David crippled all the horses, that they might not be used any more in war. And the Syrians of Damascus having joined their brethren against David, he also beat them, and slew two and twenty thousand men. Thus the Syrians also became servants to David, and brought him gifts, or paid him tribute. And in this war he got great riches, for the officers of Hadadezer wore fine ornaments of gold, which he took to Jerusalem, and out of his cities he obtained “exceeding much brass.”

Besides these spoils, David received large presents from Toi, king of Hamath, which was also in Syria. For Hadadezer had been a great foe to Toi, and was often at war with him, and sought to take his kingdom from him ; so in gratitude for his deliverance he sent Joram his son to David, to congratulate him on his victory, and to beg his acceptance of a number of vessels of silver, and gold, and brass. But David kept none of this wealth for himself, he dedicated or set apart all of it for the Lord's service, to be used when the temple should be built,—and this accounts for the abundance of precious metals, of which you will read, which David left to his son Solomon, for the purpose of raising that building.

David, moreover, put garrisons in all Edom, to keep the people quiet, and the Edomites became tributary to him, and he reigned happily and peaceably over all Israel.

And these were David's chief officers of state :

Joab, commander-in-chief.

Jehoshaphat, recorder, or keeper of the annals, or memorable events of the kingdom.





Abiathar, high priest.

Ahimelech and Zadok, assistant priests.

Seraiah, scribe, or secretary of state, to correspond with or write to great persons at home and abroad, about the affairs of the kingdom.

Benaiah, captain of the body guards, who always attended David; these were called Cherethites and Pelethites, and are thought to have been those who accompanied David in his distresses, and perhaps some were Philistines who had joined him; though some suppose that they were archers, who used the bow and arrow; and slingers, who used the sling and stone, as David did with the Philistine.

David's sons, court attendants, waiting upon the king, and ready to do what he was pleased to order them.

THE NINTH CHAPTER OF II. SAMUEL.

David's kindness to Mephibosheth.

“And David said, Is there yet any that are left of the house of Saul, that I may show him kindness for Jonathan's sake?”—
Ver. 1.

Good men always feel a pleasure in doing good, and in showing their gratitude to all who have done them good. You remember that Jonathan was the particular friend of David, and that when Saul was so cruel to him, Jonathan did all he could to serve him. David now recollected this kindness, and he inquired if there was any one of Jonathan's kindred remaining, that he might show him kindness for Jonathan's sake. Having found out Ziba, an old servant of Saul's, he learnt that Mephibosheth—of whom we have before read, and who was a son of Jonathan's—was still living in some retired part of the country called Lodebar, where his friends had probably hid him to keep him from danger. So David sent to fetch him, and when he came into David's presence, he paid the most profound respect to him as his king. And David called him





by name, and being sure that he was Jonathan's son, he told him not to fear that he would hurt him; no, he would be very kind to him for Jonathan's sake, to whom he had made a vow that he would not cut off his kindness from his house for ever, and he should have all the lands of Saul for an inheritance, and should be treated as a prince, and eat at his table.

Mephibosheth was quite overcome with this kindness, and bowing himself before David, he said, "What is thy servant, that thou shouldest look upon such a dead dog as I am?" by which he meant that his family having been cut off from the throne, and his circumstances being reduced, he was as unworthy of the king's notice as if he were but a dead dog. Mephibosheth's humility was as engaging as David's condescension, and the whole of this scene is highly lovely, interesting, and instructive. It is difficult to say who felt the greater pleasure, David in bestowing his favours, or Mephibosheth in receiving them.

Then David ordered Ziba to see after the land which he had given to his master, and to take care that it should be tilled for the use of his household, for Ziba had fifteen sons and twenty servants, and "all that dwelt in the house of Ziba were servants unto Mephibosheth." Besides, Mephibosheth had a son whose name was Micah, and him also did David include in this kind provision.

"So Mephibosheth dwelt in Jerusalem; for he did eat continually at the king's table; and he was lame on both his feet."

THE TENTH CHAPTER OF II. SAMUEL.

David's Ambassadors insulted by the Ammonites, who together with the Syrians, are defeated by Israel.

"And the princes of the children of Ammon said unto Hanun their lord, thinkest thou that David doth honour thy father that he hath sent comforters unto thee? Hath not David rather sent his servants unto thee to search the city, and to spy it out, and to overthrow it?"—Ver. 3.





We have now to notice another instance of David's grateful disposition.

After his wars with the Moabites, Syrians, and Edomites, David having learnt that the king of the Ammonites was dead, according to the custom of friendly princes towards each other,—sent to condole with the new king, Hanun, on his recent loss, and to assure him of his peaceable disposition towards him. And in this embassy he was influenced by a feeling of gratitude, recollecting that Nahash, Hanun's father, had formerly shown kindness to him.

Hanun's courtiers, however, persuaded him that David's messengers were only spies, sent to see the strength of his city that he might overthrow it. So Hanun took David's servants, and shaved off half their beards, which was one of the greatest insults that could be offered in those parts. And he cut short their garments, so as to make them look ridiculous, and sent them away.

When David heard how they had been served, he advised them to stay at Jericho, a retired place, till their beards were grown, and they were fit to appear more publicly.

The people of Ammon soon learned that they stank before David, or were disagreeable to him as any vile nuisance,—bad neighbours which he could not like, and expecting they would not forget the insults offered to his servants, they collected an army of hired Syrians, to the amount of twenty thousand men, and of the king of Maacah, a place in the tribe of Manasseh, a thousand men; and of Ishtob, or Tob, supposed to have been the place where Jephthah fled from his brethren, situated in the land of Gilead,—twelve thousand men; making in all thirty-three thousand men.

David heard of these preparations, and he was not idle, but “sent Joab and all the host of the mighty men” of Israel to give battle to these hired wretches, who, without even any cause of excuse to provoke them, had sold themselves, or had been sold by their princes, to slay their fellow-creatures.

“And the children of Ammon came out and put the battle in array at the entering in of the gate” of their city, while their hirelings from Syria were in the open field, probably intending to





attack David's army behind, while the Ammonites in the city should attack it in front.

Now, Joab was a skilful general, and when he saw that he had two armies against him, the one fronting him on one side and the other on the other side, he chose all his most courageous men to face the Syrians,—they perhaps being the most numerous,—and he trusted the others to his brother Abishai, “that he might put them in array against the children of Ammon,” and he made an agreement with him, that if either of them was forced to give way, the other should help him. He also made a speech on the occasion becoming a brave man. “Be of good courage,” said he, “and let us play the men for our people, and for the cities of our God: and the Lord do that which seemeth him good.”

Then Joab attacked the Syrians, who instantly gave way, for being but hired troops, they did not fight very heartily; and when the Ammonites saw them run, they took the alarm and fled into the city. So the victory was won. Joab did not take the city, but was satisfied that he had dispersed the armies.

However, the Syrians were so much mortified at their defeat, that they collected a larger army, and a number of kings now joined together to beat the Israelites. We are not here told what was the size of this army, but Josephus, the Jewish historian, says, it consisted of eighty thousand foot soldiers, and ten thousand horse.

David himself now seems to have taken the command of his army, and went out to meet this powerful force. And now the Syrians, probably very confident in their numbers, begun the battle, and “set themselves in array against David,” and they did not run away at first, but “fought with him—and then the Syrians fled before Israel, and David slew the men of seven hundred chariots of the Syrians, and forty thousand horsemen, and smote Shobach the captain of their host, who died there. And when all the kings that were servants” or tributary “to Hadarezer, (called before Hadadezer,) saw that they were smitten before Israel,” and could not dare any longer to contend with them, “they made peace with Israel and served them,” becoming tributary to them, and paying them money for the support of the state. “So the Syrians feared to help the children of Ammon any more.”





THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER OF II. SAMUEL.

The Murder of Uriah.

“And it came to pass, when Joab observed the city, that he assigned Uriah unto a place where he knew that valiant men were. “And the men of the city went out and fought with Joab: and there fell some of the people of the servants of David, and Uriah the Hittite died also.”—Vers. 16, 17.

The Ammonites being now left to themselves, David sent out his general, Joab, with a large army, and they destroyed the cities of Ammon and their inhabitants, and besieged Rabbah their chief city. Thus was this wicked nation destroyed for their wickedness. Sin always brings ruin.

While this army was out, David remained at Jerusalem. And as he walked one evening to enjoy the cool air on the roof of his house, which,—like those in the East, was quite flat and made to walk upon,—he saw a woman washing herself in a neighbouring house, and as she was very beautiful, he thought he should like to add her to the number of his wives. So he inquired who she was, and found that her name was Bath-sheba, and that she was the wife of Uriah, one of his officers who was gone out with Joab.

And now David, who had hitherto shown himself so good a man, did a most wicked thing, for he resolved to have Uriah's wife. Then, to cover his designs, that nobody might suspect what he was about, he sent for Uriah, and treated him very kindly, and told him he might go home to Bath-sheba, who still remained in her house; but Uriah slept in the guard-room, and would not go home while his troops were faring hard in the field of battle. So David having outwardly shown great kindness to Uriah, and, indeed, sinfully obliged him to drink till he was drunk,—wrote a letter to Joab, which he sent by him, and said, “Set ye Uriah in the fore-front of the hottest battle, and retire ye from him, that he may be smitten and die.”





This was very cruel and unjust, to order a brave man and a faithful servant to be killed; and, as he knew he did wrong, he contrived this method that Uriah might appear to die by what we call the chance of war. But David gave this order that he might get rid of Uriah, and then marry his wife.

Joab did not know if Uriah had committed any crime or not, but he readily obeyed the king's orders, and Uriah was slain.

Then Joab sent a message to David to tell him, Uriah was dead; and knowing that it was an unfair way of punishing Uriah, even if he had committed any crime, he concealed the order from the messenger, who did not go and say, Uriah is dead as the king commanded; but, "the shooters shot from off the wall upon thy servants, and some of the king's servants be dead, and thy servant Uriah the Hittite is dead also." Joab pretended that the king might appear angry at exposing Uriah to such a danger, and might ask, "Who smote Abimelech, the son of Jerubbesheth?—did not a woman cast a piece of a mill-stone upon him from the wall, that he died in Thebez?"—of which you have read in the ninth chapter of Judges, and fifty-third verse. So the king might tell the messenger that Joab should have remembered Abimelech's fate, and not so have endangered Uriah.

However, the king did not need Joab's pretences to help him out, for he said very coolly, "The sword devoureth one as well as another," and Joab must take more care in future and make his battle more strong.

All this time, David knew that it was not the sword that had devoured Uriah, properly speaking,—though he had been killed in war,—but his death was settled by himself, and that poor Uriah was, in reality, as much murdered as if he himself had shot him.

Uriah now being dead, there was no obstacle in the way to Bathsheba marrying David. She put on mourning, for a while, for her husband, and then "David sent and fetched her to his house, and she became his wife."

What do you suppose God, who sees all things, thought of this wicked act of David's? It did not escape his notice, and though David was his favoured servant, the thing that he had done





"displeased the Lord," for all sin is displeasing to God, and will be punished in this world or the next. The punishment that David brought upon himself will hereafter be related.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER OF II. SAMUEL.

Nathan the Prophet's solemn Message to David.

"And the Lord sent Nathan unto David."—Ver. 1.

After a while,—when David would be less likely to suspect the nature of the message and its suitability to himself, and so might be made to condemn himself, as you will soon learn,—Nathan was sent to David to speak to him in a parable, and so by telling him a tale which seemed to refer to some one else, bring home the charge of guilt to his own conscience!

This parable is very tender and pretty.

"There were two men in one city; the one rich and the other poor. The rich man had exceeding many flocks and herds; but the poor man had nothing save one little ewe lamb, which he had brought and nourished up: and it grew up together with him, and with his children: it did eat of his own meat, and drank of his own cup, and lay in his own bosom, and was unto him as a daughter. And there came a traveller unto the rich man, and he spared to take of his own flock, and of his own herd, to dress for the way-faring man that was come unto him, but he took the poor man's lamb and dressed it for the man that was come to him."

When David heard this story, which he thought was about what had happened to one of his subjects, but which was only a parable about himself and Uriah, he was very angry at the man that took the poor man's lamb; and he declared that he should be put to death for so cruel a robbery, and make a recompense, by giving him four lambs for the one he had lost.

Now here he pronounced sentence against himself; for the two men who lived in one city meant David and Uriah, who lived in Jerusalem. David was a rich king, and Uriah comparatively a





poor man, though an officer. The rich man had many flocks and herds, which were the chief wealth of rich men in those days ; by which Nathan meant, that David, like the rich men of his time, had many wives ; but the poor man had only one little ewe lamb, by which he meant, that Uriah had only one wife, which he had bought, as men did their wives in the East : and then, what he says further of the lamb was, to show how fondly he was attached to Bath-sheba. Then there came a traveller to the rich man—an evil desire came to David—and to satisfy that, he took the poor man's lamb, meaning Bath-sheba, of whom he cruelly robbed Uriah. This was a very ingenious way of telling David of his sin, for, perhaps, he would hardly have borne to have been directly called to an account for it. But after he had pronounced sentence against the rich man for taking the lamb, what could he say for himself in killing poor Uriah and stealing Bath-sheba ?

Nathan, the prophet, being helped by God to speak this wise parable, was now helped to speak boldly and plainly to David. "And Nathan said to David, Thou art the man." And Nathan told him how many things God had allowed him to have, and he would have added yet more if necessary. "Wherefore," then, said he, "hast thou despised the commandment of the Lord to do evil in his sight ? Thou hast killed Uriah, the Hittite, with the sword, and hast taken his wife to be thy wife, and hast slain him with the sword of the children of Ammon. Now, therefore, the sword shall never depart from thine house, because thou hast despised me, and hast taken the wife of Uriah, the Hittite, to be thy wife."

Then David confessed his sin and repented : and his repentance is beautifully expressed in the fifty-first Psalm, some of which I may explain when we come to it.

God, however, visited David with his displeasure. He had a son born to him, whose mother was Bath-sheba, but God instantly took him away, to the great grief of David. However, another son was afterwards born to him, and him God spared ; so he called his name Solomon, which means peaceful, because he hoped that God had pardoned him and was now at peace with him and the prophet called upon him and desired him also to give him the name of Jedidiah, which means "beloved of the Lord."





You remember, that when we last read of Joab he was besieging Rabbah, where Uriah was killed. He now took the city; and before the Ammonites should finally surrender, he asked David to make haste to it, that he might have the honour of the prisoners surrendering to him; so David gathered some more troops and went and fought against that part of the city which was not conquered, and he took it.

And now, king Hanun, who had so insulted David's messengers, and cut off their beards, fell into David's hands; and he took his crown from his head and put it on his own, which was to show that the kingdom of Hanun now belonged to him. This was a rich crown, being worth about a talent of gold, which was above five thousand pounds of our English money; besides this, David took abundance of spoil from the city.

Then he made the people slaves, and employed them in sawing, in making iron harrows, or in mining, and in "hewing of wood, and making of brick." This is all that is supposed to be meant in the last verse, which, without this explanation, may, perhaps, be supposed to mean something very cruel, because it is said, "he put the people under saws, and under harrows of iron, and under axles of iron, and made them pass through the brick-kiln: and thus did he do unto all the cities of the children of Ammon." The Bible was originally written in Hebrew, and sometimes it has been found rather difficult to express plainly all its meaning in English, and so people have, in a few places, mistaken its meaning.

The Israelites were, however, sometimes terrible executioners of God's justice on the wicked heathen idolaters; but in this they are never to be copied, because they had a particular commission for what they did, and were not taught, as we are, the sweet and merciful doctrines of our meek and gracious Saviour.





THE THIRTEENTH AND FOURTEENTH CHAPTERS OF II. SAMUEL.

Amnon killed by Absalom.

"Now Absalom had commanded his servants, saying, Mark ye now, when Amnon's heart is merry with wine, and when I say unto you, Smite Amnon, then kill him, fear not, have not I commanded you?—be courageous and valiant."—Chap. xiii. 28.

Two of David's sons, who had different mothers, were named Absalom and Amnon. Absalom had a sister on whom Amnon laid violent hands, treating her in a very cruel manner; and though he once pretended to be exceedingly fond of her, he suddenly took so great a dislike to her, that it is even said, "he hated her," and he ordered his servants to insult her and turn her violently away from his presence.

Tamar, in her great affliction at his ill-treatment, put on mourning, and attracted the notice of her brother Absalom, who desired her not to mind the insult, but secretly intended to take vengeance on his half-brother, whom he hated for his behaviour to his own sister.

So, two years after, when it might have been supposed that he had forgotten all that had passed, he invited Amnon to go and partake of a feast at his sheep-shearing; and while Amnon was merry with wine, and probably intoxicated, Absalom's servants,—whom he had previously told what to do,—fell upon Amnon at the feast, before all his brethren, who had also been invited, and slew him.

The news at first reached king David that all his other sons had been killed by order of Absalom, and he was in great distress, and according to custom, as a sign of grief, rent his clothes; but he soon learnt that Amnon only was killed.

In the meanwhile, Absalom fled to his mother's relations, and his grandfather Talmai, king of Geshur, protected him for three years.

David was very fond of Absalom, and at last gave over grieving





for Amnon, and longed to see Absalom again, who seemed to him to have been absent a very long time.

Joab, David's general, was friendly with Absalom, so, being a subtle man, he contrived to get the king's leave for him to be brought back to Jerusalem.

For this purpose, he sent to Tekoah, a city of Judah, about twelve miles from Jerusalem, and got the help of a woman who was reckoned very wise and prudent, and with whom he could safely trust the affair. She was not to anoint herself with oil,—as fashionable women did, to appear beautiful,—but to dress like a mourner, and seem very much distressed, and then to go to the king and relate a fable which Joab invented for her.

So, having obtained access to the king, and made her obeisance to him, she told him that she had two sons who had quarrelled, and the one had slain the other; and now her family had demanded that the other son, who survived, should be executed for having killed his brother; and she was greatly in distress, for what should she do if she were left without a son;—they would quench her coal entirely; by which she meant, they would cut off the last of her family and destroy it, as much as fire is destroyed when water is poured upon the last burning coal.

The king, having heard her so far, told her to go home, and he would inquire into the matter.

Then the woman said, she was ready to be considered in fault if she should do wrong in pardoning her son, and his throne should be guiltless.

The king replied, that she need not fear about that, and if any one reproached her, she was to have him brought before him, and he should be prevented from troubling her any more.

Yet once more, the woman pleaded that the king would remember the Lord his God, who is very merciful; and that he would show the like mercy, and promise that her son should always be protected against the avenger of blood, if any one, at any time, should rise up to slay him for killing his brother.





David assured her that not a hair of his head should be hurt.

Having obtained pardon for her pretended son, for the pretended murder of his brother—for all this, as I said, was a fable—she then asked leave to speak one word more; and the king having given her leave, she intimated that the king was not acting consistently, when he was ready to pardon her son for the murder of his brother, and yet would not pardon his own son, Absalom, for the same crime, but allowed him to remain in banishment; also, that his severity to his son was injurious to the people of God—Israel, who wished for his return; and that, in neglecting it, he was not doing his duty to his kingdom. Besides, she added, that we must needs die, and therefore, Amnon must have died some time if Absalom had not killed him, and the killing Absalom would not bring him to life again. This was a poor excuse for a murderer, but was followed by a better plea—that God, who is no respecter of persons, has mercy on the most vile, and restores them to his favour; this plea, however, should not apologize for such a black crime as that of killing a brother. Then she added, that the reason of her pleading with the king for Absalom was, that the people had made her afraid;—probably meaning, that she feared a rebellion would take place in behalf of Absalom, if the king did not restore him; and she blended her excuse with the fable about her son, that she might still remind the king of what he had already promised. In conclusion, she flattered the king that she was sure he was kind-hearted—"the word of my lord the king shall now be comfortable" and that he was also wise and prudent to see what he ought to do, "for as an angel of God, so is my lord the king, to discern good and bad."

The king now saw that all she had related about her son was a fable, and that she meant, under it, to bring about the pardon of Absalom, the king's own son, for the murder of his brother; and as he thought she would not take this trouble for Absalom out of her own head, he suspected that Joab had set her on, he being Absalom's friend. And the woman confessed that he had, and that he had told her what to say, and had made the fable that David might grant pardon to the brother who murdered his brother, without his suspecting for whom she was pleading.





David saw that as he had pronounced pardon for her supposed son, he could not now punish Absalom, his own son, for the same crime, without making himself look unmerciful towards him. So he said to Joab, who was present, that he might bring back his son; and Joab humbly thanked the king, and went and fetched Absalom; however, David would not allow him to see his face or appear at court, so Absalom was shut up in his own house.

It appears that this young man was very handsome, and without the least blemish; and his hair was so fine that whenever he had it cut, it weighed, together with the oil and gold dust, which was used for powder, upwards of three pounds. He was married, and had three sons, and a daughter named Tamar, who was very fair and handsome, like himself.

After Absalom had remained two years in Jerusalem without being allowed to appear at court, he began to grow impatient, and perhaps, thought that Joab neglected him in not carrying his efforts any further in his behalf. So he sent for Joab to talk with him about the business, but he had some reasons why he did not like to go. Then he sent again, but Joab still kept himself away. So, being resolved to see Joab, he ordered his servants to set his field of barley on fire, which was near Absalom's, and when Joab learnt who had done it, he went to complain to Absalom.

Then Absalom complained of his hard fate, and was bold enough to excuse himself, and to declare that he was ready to die if he had done any thing wrong. This message Joab gave to David, and he took compassion on Absalom, and allowed him to leave his house, and in token of reconciliation, "the king kissed Absalom."

THE FIFTEENTH CHAPTER OF II. SAMUEL.

Absalom's Rebellion.

"And the conspiracy was strong; for the people increased continually with Absalom."—Ver. 12.

After David had been reconciled to Absalom, "Absalom prepared him chariots, and horses, and fifty men to run before him."





that he might look very grand before the people, and that they might show that he was coming. Also, to prove that he was no sluggard, "he rose up early and stood beside the way of the gate" of the city or the palace; and when people came to complain to the king about any ill usage from others, he stopped them, talked to them about it, and told them their case was very good and just, and their complaints were such as ought to be attended to,—but the king, he said, would not regard them. Then he lamented that he was not appointed their judge to do them justice. And if any one approached him he was very kind to him and kissed him,—as men embrace each other in the East,—and by this seemingly gracious behaviour, he won the hearts of the people of Israel.

Now, "after forty years," which some suppose was when Absalom might be forty years of age,—but this is not certain,—Absalom asked the king for leave to go to Hebron, to pay a vow, which he had made at Geshur, that he would offer some offering to God at Hebron, if he should be restored to Jerusalem. So David gave him leave. But this was most likely but a pretence, for as soon as Absalom got to Hebron, which was at the convenient distance of only twenty miles from Jerusalem, he began to conspire to seize his father's throne. And he "sent spies throughout all the land of Israel," to see how people liked him, and to persuade them to prefer him to his father; and these were to say that when they heard the trumpet sounded any where, which he had probably employed men to blow, then they were to cry out that Absalom was king.

Absalom also got two hundred men of power away from his father, under the pretence of inviting them to partake of the feast of his peace-offerings; and then he invited and gained over Ahithophel, who was David's most clever counsellor, and by his various arts, "the people increased continually with Absalom."

"And there came a messenger to David saying, The hearts of the men of Israel are after Absalom." Then David, and his servants, and his body guard, instantly fled from Jerusalem; and though David urged Ittai, the Gittite, who guarded his person, to leave him with six hundred other Gittites, this man, who was one of Gath, would not act unfaithfully towards him, but resolved,





with his soldiers, to live or die with him. Great numbers of the people, too, went weeping along with him, for it was a very affecting thing to see an old king driven from his throne by the unprovoked rebellion of his own son.

Zadok the priest, and Abiathar, and all the Levites, also, took away the ark, but David advised them to carry it back, being persuaded that if his conduct now pleased God, God would yet restore him to the spot where it was kept, and which he was accustomed to love.

And now the procession moved forward up the Mount of Olives, near Jerusalem; and David and all the people covered their heads as mourners, and wept; and David walked with bare feet, in token of his humiliation.

And one told David that Ahithophel was among the conspirators, and David prayed, "O Lord, turn the counsel of Ahithophel into foolishness;" meaning, that God would make him appear like a foolish adviser.

When David reached the top of the mount, he worshipped God and prayed, and here he was overtaken by Hushai, the Archite, who "came to meet him with his coat rent, and earth upon his head."

Now Hushai was no warrior, but a wise, prudent man, and so he would have been of no use to David as a defence. But he told him how he might serve him. And he advised him to go to Absalom, and tell him he would be his counsellor as he had been his father's; and so he might get at the counsel which the wise Ahithophel might give, and either inform David of it or persuade Absalom not to follow it. Moreover, the priests, Zadok and Abiathar, would help him; these had two sons, Ahimaaz and Jonathan, and if Hushai told them what was doing, they could send their sons secretly with the news; and this was a good scheme, as no one would suspect what was going on, as he might have religious matters to engage him with the priests. "So Hushai, David's friend, came into the city, and Absalom came into Jerusalem," and both met together at the same time.





THE SIXTEENTH CHAPTER OF II. SAMUEL.

*Ziba's base conduct to Mephibosheth.—Shimei curses David.—
Hushai deceives Absalom.*

“And the king said, And where is thy master's son? And Ziba said unto the king, Behold, he abideth at Jerusalem: for he said, To-day shall the house of Israel restore me the kingdom of my father.”—Ver. 3.

“When David was a little past the top” of the Mount of Olives, which we read of his ascending, “Ziba, the servant of Mephibosheth, met him with a couple of asses saddled, and upon them two hundred loaves of bread,” or more properly, thin cakes, made without yeast, for such was the shape, and also the kind of ancient Jewish bread,—“and an hundred bunches of raisins,” which were usually dried in the sun, “and an hundred of summer fruits,” probably cucumbers and water-melons,—which are about Judea exceedingly fine in flavour, and much in use to quench the thirst occasioned by the great heat,—“and a bottle of wine,” which was a goat's skin full, that being the bottle of the East, and not one of glass, like our bottles. This bottle would hold a great deal; a mere quart of wine would have been of little use in so great a company.

Then the king asked Ziba what he meant by his load, who replied, that the asses were for the king's own family to ride on, great personages being used to ride upon the beautiful Eastern asses. And the bread and fruit were to refresh the young men who were the king's guards and soldiers.

Then David inquired after Ziba's master's son,—meaning Mephibosheth, the son of Saul,—and he perhaps, thought he had sent him this present, but could not account for his not coming along with it. Then Ziba told David a most wicked falsehood—“Behold, he abideth at Jerusalem: for he said, To-day shall the house of Israel restore me the kingdom of my father;” meaning that Mephibosheth expected now that David had fled, that he





should recover the throne of his father Saul. Now, there was no probability of this, for Absalom would have prevented it, if David could not have returned; and this story of the humble, quiet, and grateful Mephibosheth was made up by Ziba, that he might provoke David to take away all his lands and give them to him. I am sorry to say, that, in this instance, David was too easily imposed upon; he took Ziba at his word, and supposing that Mephibosheth was guilty of treachery and aspired to his throne, he pronounced his estates to be forfeited, and said to Ziba, "Behold, thine are all that pertaineth to Mephibosheth; that is, I give you all Mephibosheth's lands. And the vile man flattered the king, and hoped that he should yet receive further proofs of his favour.

David now approached a place in the tribe of Benjamin, called Bahurim; and a man, whose name was Shimei, and who was related to Saul, came forth from the city and cursed David. And such was his bitterness against him, that he threw stones at him, and even at his warriors who were about him, to show how much he despised them. Who, in his senses, would angrily throw stones, if he only thought that this was the crime of wicked Shimei, who cursed David? And Shimei called David ill names—a bloody man and a son of Belial, and accused him of shedding the blood of Saul and his sons, though they had fallen by the hands of the Philistines—and of the murder of Ish-bosheth he was not only innocent, but had executed justice on the murderers. "Innocency is no defence against malice and falsehood," but God is a defence to the innocent, and so he was to David. David's servants would have taken instant vengeance, and have cut off Shimei's head, but David bore his insults with patience, since he believed that the Lord had permitted him to add to his affliction for wise and useful purposes.

While these things happened, Absalom and Hushai met together at Jerusalem, and Ahithophel also. As soon as Hushai, David's friend, saw Absalom, he cried out, "God save the king! God save the king!" He, however, meant king David, for Absalom was no king. Then Absalom, supposing he meant himself, reproached him with deserting David, and said, "Is this thy kindness to thy





friend?" Hushai again answered very cautiously, still thinking about David being his rightful king, "Nay, but whom the Lord, and this people, and all the men of Israel choose, his will I be, and with him will I abide;" and if Absalom were king, why should he scruple to serve him? Now, he knew that the Lord had chosen David, and that Absalom was not king, and therefore he did not intend to serve him. There was a great deal of cunning in all this, which is not a praiseworthy thing; but God overruled it all for the good of David.

Then Ahithophel advised Absalom to pay a visit to David's concubines, or inferior sort of wives, which he had left behind to keep his palace; and as no man durst to look at them but the king,—which is still the custom in the East,—his going to see them was at once a declaration that he had become king; and he took care that he should make his visit as public as possible, that all Israel should know it. This was the subtle advice of Ahithophel, who was a man of such deep counsel, that men considered him almost as good as if they had inquired of the priest by means of the oracle of God, that is, the Ephod.

THE SEVENTEENTH CHAPTER OF II. SAMUEL.

Ahithophel's wicked counsel defeated by Hushai.

"And Hushai said unto Absalom, The counsel that Ahithophel hath given is not good at this time."—Ver. 7.

The only impediment to Absalom's complete possession of the throne was the life of his father, for, as long as he lived, there would be many who would follow him. So the wicked Ahithophel proposed that he should be allowed to choose a thousand of the bravest men of each tribe, making twelve thousand, and he would pursue David, and coming up with him while he was weary and weak-handed,—or guarded by a few men only,—he would put him to flight, and then pursue him only, and kill him. David being slain, all the people would then acknowledge Absa-





lom as their king ; for he said, " The man whom thou seekest"—David—"is as if all returned : " only secure or kill him, and it will insure the return of all the rest.

If Absalom had ordered Ahithophel's head to be struck off for proposing to murder his father, and so good a father too, he would but have done justice according to the law of God ; but this wicked son was even "pleased" with the plan. However, God put it into his heart to ask Hushai's opinion about it. Hushai, you know, was David's friend, whom he had sent to defeat the counsel of Ahithophel, and he did so most wisely. "Thou knowest," said he, "thy father and his men, that they be mighty men," men of great bravery, "and they be chafed," or fretful and enraged in their minds, "as a bear robbed of her whelps in the field ;" for the she-bear, when she has any of her whelps hurt, is a most furious creature, and will then violently attack any person or animal she may meet. Then he proceeded to say, that David was "a man of war," who would not lodge with the people in the camp, but in some pit, where he might surprise his enemy, or, at least, escape being surprised. And if it should so happen that he should fall unawares upon any of Absalom's men, and they should flee, it would strike a panic into the whole, and the report would soon spread abroad, that Absalom's army was defeated. Then he advised that "all Israel," that is, the fighting men, "from Dan to Beer-sheba," that is, from one end of the country to the other—where these places stood—should be gathered together to march against David, and then they might come upon his army like dew upon the ground, the drops of which are exceedingly numerous, and so they would easily slay the whole. Or, if they had taken shelter in any city, they could soon storm it with their rope-ladders for scaling walls, and being so numerous, they would demolish it and them, as easily as if they drew the whole city into the water with which its walls might be surrounded.

God disposed Absalom's mind to prefer this counsel to that of Ahithophel. Had he followed the advice of that wicked man. David would most likely have been slain, for it was all true that he said. But, by following that of Hushai, time was gained for





David to prepare himself, and for Hushai to send him word about Absalom's intended attack.

While these deliberations were taking place, Hushai informed Zadok and Abiathar, the priests,—who also were faithful to their king,—and he advised them to send directly to David, and urge him to get out of the plain where he was, lest, if Absalom should yet follow the advice of Ahithophel, he might be suddenly overthrown, and to avoid the overwhelming army which, on his plan, would be sent against him.

The priests then sent to their sons, Jonathan and Ahimaaz, who remained at a spot out of the city, that they might be ready to take any message to David; and that no suspicion might fall on them, they sent a wench, or girl, to the young men; and they went and told David what Hushai wanted him to know.

The young men had, however, a narrow escape by the way, for they were seen by a lad conversing with the girl; and this lad being, probably, one of Absalom's spies, went directly and told him. The young men hurried forward and went to a man's house in Bahurim—the place where Shimei had cursed David. Here there was a well in the court; and—the man and his wife being, probably, loyally attached to David,—the messengers were concealed in it: most likely, the well was dry, so that the messengers would not be hurt by going down into it, and then “the woman took and spread a covering over the well's mouth, and spread ground corn,” or corn in the bran, “thereon, and the thing was not known.”

Absalom soon sent servants in search of the men, whose persons and names seem to have been well known, and they got information about their going to the house at Bahurim; but the woman denied that they were there, and said, that they were gone over the water, or river Jordan; and so they returned to Jerusalem. I cannot justify the woman for the way in which she saved the young men; she might have devised such an answer as would have prevented her telling a lie.

David immediately followed Hushai's advice, and passing the fords of Jordan in the night, he and his men all got safely over.

Ahithophel was so much mortified that Hushai's counsel had





been followed rather than his, that he went to his house at Giloh, and there, having "put his house in order," or settled his affairs, he hanged himself. He also foresaw that David would now conquer and return to Jerusalem, and then he must suffer the death of a traitor; and he would rather become a self-murderer than fall into the hands of justice.

"Then David came to Mahanaim," a city on the other side of Jordan, in the tribe of Gad. "And Absalom passed over Jordan, he and all the men of Israel with him," and he pitched in the land of Gilead, and gave the command of his troops to Amasa.

In the midst of his distress, David met with several friends,—Shobi, a younger brother of the royal family of the Ammonites, who, it is supposed, disapproved of the indignity which his brother Hanun had done to David's ambassadors; Machir, the same kind-hearted man who had pitied and taken care of Mephibosheth, when David found him out and supported him; and Barzillai, of whom we shall further read. These, as David had fled in haste without any comforts, brought beds for the weary to rest, and basins, and earthen vessels to put their liquors in, and food of various sorts used in the East. We ought always to show pity to those who are in distress.

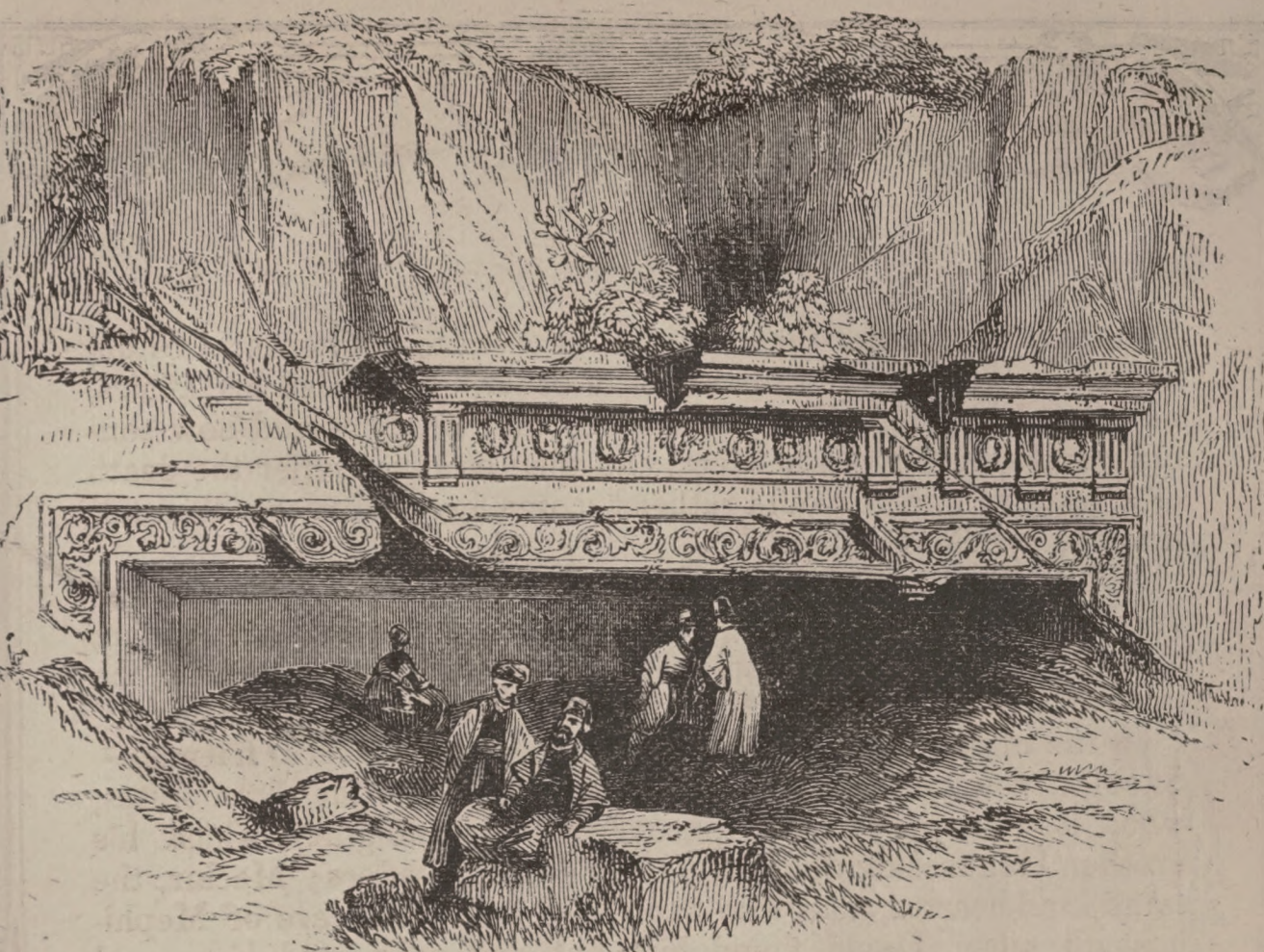
THE EIGHTEENTH CHAPTER OF II. SAMUEL.

Absalom's Defeat and Death.

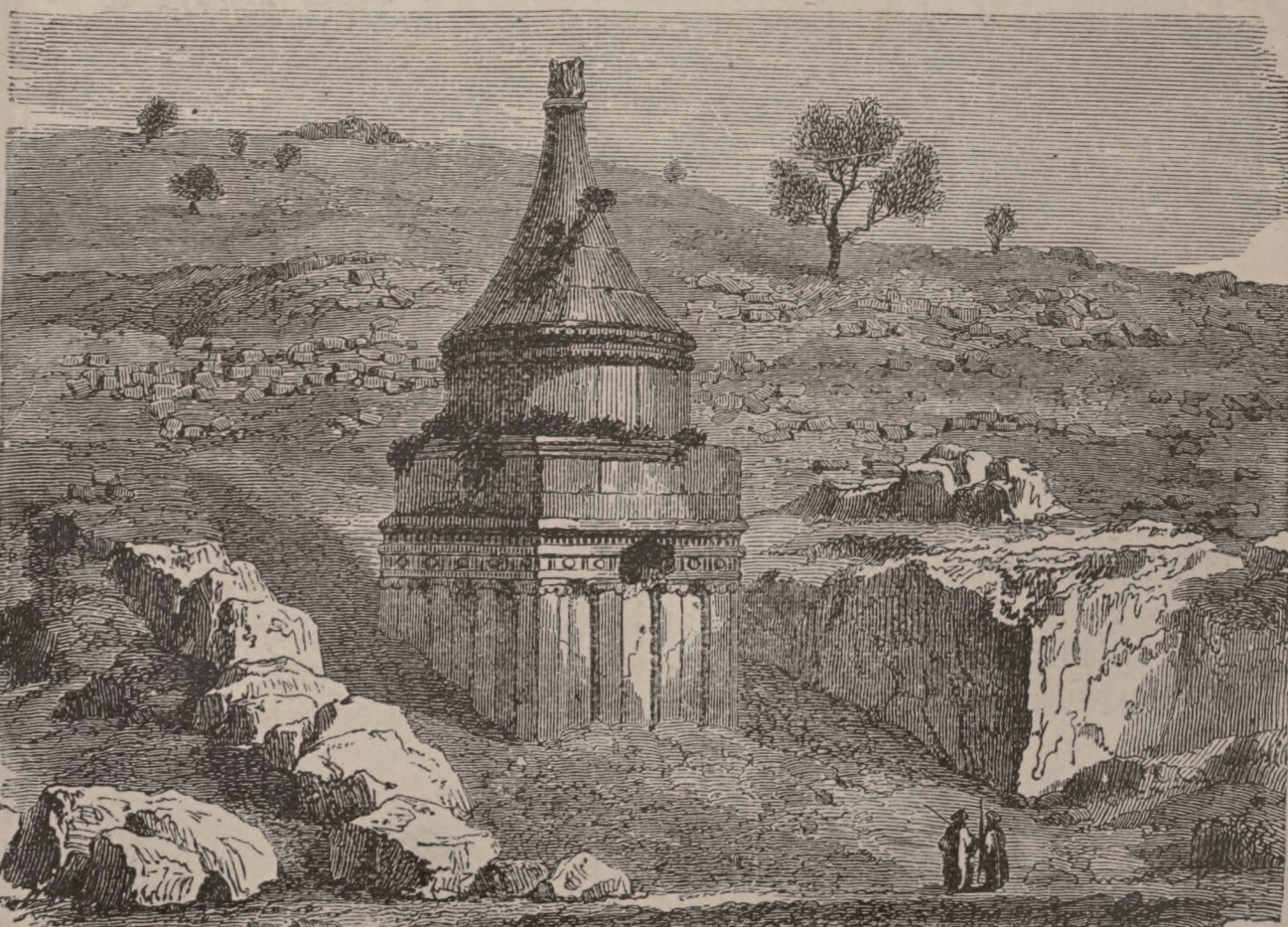
'The people of Israel were slain before the servants of David, and there was there a great slaughter that day of twenty thousand men.'—Ver. 7.

David now divided his army into companies of thousands and hundreds, and set captains over them. Then he divided the whole into three parts, and appointed three generals to command them—Joab, Abishai, Joab's brother, and Ittai the Gittite; and he intended himself to be commander-in-chief over these, but the people would not let him go, lest he should be killed, which would





TOMBS OF THE KINGS.



TOMB OF ABSALOM.



THE DEATH OF ABSALOM



have thrown them all into confusion and made Absalom king, who would have been avenged on them for defending David ; and they advised David rather to stay in the city of Mahanaim, and send them succour by forwarding provisions and recruits.

And now the army marched to meet Absalom, but as it passed through the gate of the city, David commanded the generals to "deal gently" with Absalom if he should fall into their hands, and rather take him alive than hurt or kill him. He was delighted to think of killing his father, when it was proposed to him, but this fond father would not hurt a hair of the head of his rebellious son ; he knew that he was not fit to die, and hoped that he might be saved alive, that so he might repent and seek mercy, and God might forgive all his sins.

"So the people went out into the field against Israel ; and the battle was in the wood of Ephraim." This was not a wood in the tribe of Ephraim, but in the land of Gilead across the river Jordan, and was probably called the wood of Ephraim, because, in the time of Jephthah, forty two thousand Ephraimites were slain near it by the men of Gilead.

Absalom's army was soon put to flight, and twenty thousand of his soldiers perished. In their flight, their ranks became broken, and they ran over the country in all directions ; but vast numbers tried to escape through the wood, where they were easily overtaken, by being caught in thickets ; and some might fall into pits, and it is supposed that some were devoured by wild beasts ; so that "the wood devoured more people that day than the sword devoured," for there were more people slain in it than in the open field.

Absalom fled among the rest ; in passing through the wood, he met with some of David's troops, and in hastening from them on his mule, either his fine hair was caught in the branches of an oak tree, or, as is rather believed, his neck was stuck fast in a forked branch, and the mule going forward, left him hanging alive.

One of David's soldiers saw this accident, and ran and told Joab ; who asked the man why he did not kill Absalom ; and told him that if he had done so, he would have given him ten shekels of silver, about twenty-four shillings of our money, and a girdle, which was a mark of great honour and promotion. But the man





told Joab he would not have killed Absalom for a thousand shekels of silver, after David had given so strict a charge to spare his life, for he should have exposed his own life to danger for disobedience, and even Joab would then have condemned him.



So Joab went himself, taking three darts with him, and thrust them into Absalom; and ten young men who attended Joab thrust darts into him also, so that they were sure he was dead.

Having slain David's wicked son, the chief of the rebellion, Joab ordered a trumpet to be blown, to call back his men, that they might pursue the rebel army no longer, as they would now submit, and he did not want to shed any more blood.

Then they took Absalom's body and cast it "into a great pit in the wood, and laid a very great heap of stones upon him," to be a monument of his villany, and to signify that he ought to have been stoned as a rebellious son. (See Deut. xxi. 20, 21.)

Absalom little expected to die such a death, and to be buried





in such a manner. In his pride he had erected a very handsome monument for the reception of his body when he should die, in a place called the King's Dale, or valley—the valley of Jehoshaphat; for he said, “I have no son to keep my name in remembrance,” though he had had three sons, but all were dead—“and he called the pillar after his own name,” and it was still called “Absalom's place,” when this history was written.

Ahimaaz, the son of Zadok, was now with Joab, and he begged him to let him run and inform David of the victory; but as Joab did not wish him to carry news which would displease the king, as Absalom's death would, he told him not to go. Then he ordered Cush, an Ethiopian,—or black, as some suppose,—to hasten with the tidings. After Cush was gone, Ahimaaz still urged Joab to let him go, though he had “no tidings ready,” but what Cush had; then he allowed him, and he outran Cush, as Cush took a hilly road, and Ahimaaz a flat one.

David was anxiously waiting for news, and so he sat between the two gates of the city; one gate being within another, between two walls that surrounded the place. And the watchman mounted the tower over the wall, and looked to see if any messenger was coming. And when he saw a man running, he called out to the king; and the king said, if the man was alone he brought news as a messenger, for if he had had others with him, it would have been a sign that they were part of his army put to flight. Presently the watchman called to the porter below, who kept the outward gate, that there was another man running, and that the foremost looked like Ahimaaz. And David was pleased, for he said that Ahimaaz was a good man, and would not run to tell him bad news.

To encourage David's heart, Ahimaaz called out, as soon as he could be heard, “All is well;” meaning that the victory was gained. And then he approached the king, and bowed himself before him, and blessed God for the victory.

Poor David was, however, alarmed for his wicked son, and his first question was, “Is the young man Absalom safe?” Ahimaaz evaded the question, and David waited for Cush.

Cush saluted David in a similar manner to Ahimaaz, and the





king asked the same question about Absalom. And Cushi replied, "The enemies of my lord the king, and all that rise against thee to do thee hurt, be as that young man is;" meaning, in a delicate way, that he was dead, which he wished were the case with all David's enemies; as they rebelled against a king whom God had especially set up. And the king ran up to the watchman's chamber, and there he wept alone: but cried aloud in great distress, "O my son Absalom! my son, my son Absalom! would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!" If David was pained to think in how unprepared a state Absalom was hurried into eternity, he was right in yielding to his bitter grief; but if he only felt distressed as a kind father losing his rebellious yet beloved son, he was to be blamed; because, instead of being thankful to God for his deliverance, he seemed as if he was angry at what had happened, and as if he would rather have died himself than have survived his son.

THE NINETEENTH CHAPTER OF II. SAMUEL.

David's Return to Jerusalem.

"So the king returned and came to Jordan, and Judah came to Gilgal, to go to meet the king, to conduct the king over Jordan."—Ver. 15.

The news reached Joab that David was much grieved for the loss of Absalom; the victory was therefore turned into mourning by the people, instead of being an occasion of joy, which was usual at such times. And instead of marching triumphantly into the city like conquerors, the people stole in like cowards, lest they should displease the king: for David would not see his generals, and covered his face with his mantle, as mourners did, and still cried, "O my son Absalom! O Absalom, my son, my son!"

Joab, at last, got leave to see David, and he spoke very boldly to him, and told him how ill he had used the people that had done him so much service, and saved his life, and the lives of





all the other parts of his family, all of whom might have perished, had Absalom gained the victory. And he urged him to go and show himself to the people, and speak kindly to them, instead of lamenting what they had done, or his army would all desert him.

So the king went and sat in the gate, which was a public place of the city, where many people were constantly passing; and there they assembled and congratulated him on saving his kingdom.

Then the tribes of Israel began to talk about what David had done for them in saving them from the Philistines, and that something should be done to convey him back to Jerusalem. And David sent to Zadok and Abiathar the priests, to urge them to arouse the tribe of Judah, who were yet negligent to join in restoring him; for "the speech of all Israel," or the invitations of the people, had been sent to him to return to his palace and city.

He also reminded that tribe, by a message, that they were his nearest brethren, he being of the same tribe; and as for Amasa, who had commanded Absalom's army, he would not only pardon him, but make him commander instead of Joab; indeed, he must have disliked him for having killed his son, and he had displeased him by his conduct on several other occasions.

So all Judah directly joined the king, and he went back to Jerusalem.

Just as David had passed over Jordan, he was met by Shimei, who had cursed him in his flight; and also Ziba, the servant of Mephibosheth, who probably hoped to gain the king's favour before he should learn that he had done a very wicked thing to his innocent master, in falsely accusing him as a traitor to David. Shimei had a thousand men of Benjamin with him, from which it is thought that he was an officer or commander. And he fell down before the king—owned that he had sinned—and asked for pardon.

Abishai, however, advised the king to put him to death. But David reproved him sharply and wisely; for if he had begun by executing this offender, as soon as he had crossed the river, all the soldiers of Absalom would have taken the alarm, and a new rebellion must have followed. So David told Abishai that he would





do as he pleased, and would let him know that he was king over Israel, and Shimei should not die.

Next came Mephibosheth, who had been so grieved at David's misfortunes, that, since he had left Jerusalem, he had "neither dressed his feet, nor trimmed his beard, nor washed his clothes;" and these being all tokens of deep mourning, showed that he had not concealed his sorrow at the loss of his friend.

Then the king asked Mephibosheth why he had not gone with him, as a friend, when he quitted Jerusalem. And Mephibosheth told him that he had ordered Ziba to saddle an ass for the purpose, as he was lame and could not walk; but Ziba had deceived him and gone alone to the king, and told a great falsehood against him. This the king might now learn, and see from the state of his dress, which was plainly a mourning of long continuance, and not just assumed. As for Ziba, he left the king to do what was good in his own eyes respecting him, either to pardon or punish him; for he who had been saved from death by his kindness could not presume to tell him what to do, or to ask another favour.

To this David replied, "Why speakest thou any more of thy matters?" or of what I have done for thee; forget all that, and "thou and Ziba divide the land" as before. Ziba deserved to be punished, but David also showed him mercy; for he might perhaps have had friends who would have stirred up some fresh strife, and David now longed for peace and rest. Mephibosheth was very well pleased, and was willing that Ziba might even have all, as his grateful heart was satisfied in seeing the king once more restored to the throne.

Among those who accompanied David over Jordan, was Barzilai, of whose kindness to David, in bringing him beds, basins, and food, we read before; and in addition to that, he had "provided the king of sustenance while he lay at Mahanaim." David, who had a very grateful heart, wished much that Barzillai would go with him to Jerusalem, and he would feed him there; not that Barzillai wanted food, but David wanted him, in return for his kindness, to be a constant guest at the royal table. Barzillai, however, refused, on account of his age; for being scarcely able to know





good from evil, from increasing weakness of body and mind, he could be of no use as a privy counsellor; and having lost his taste, rich food would be no treat; and being deaf, the king's music could yield him no pleasure, and so he could only be a burden to the court, neither receiving nor giving delight. Besides, he thought the reward was much more than he deserved for what he had done for the king.

Barzillai therefore asked leave to return home, but as the king was inclined to show him kindness, he begged him to take his son Chimham with him in his stead. So the king agreed to take Chimham with him, and "kissed Barzillai, and blessed him; and he returned to his own place."

Unfortunately, David's return was not quite in peace. The men of Israel were jealous that the men of Judah should have escorted the king without letting them know, and the men of Judah were very angry at the words of the ten tribes of Israel. We shall see, by and by, what mischief comes from jealousy and quarrelling.

THE TWENTIETH CHAPTER OF II. SAMUEL.

Sheba's Rebellion and Death.

"And there happened to be there a man of Belial, whose name was Sheba, the son of Bichri, a Benjamite; and he blew a trumpet and said, We have no part in David, neither have we inheritance in the son of Jesse."—Ver. 1.

"A man of Belial," that is, a lawless wicked man, whose name was Sheba, took advantage of the quarrel between Israel and Judah, and advised the men of Israel to go home to their tents and not guard David to Jerusalem: and they followed his advice, the men of Judah only remaining with David.

In the meantime, David having returned to Jerusalem, as it has been a custom in the East, and is indeed still, not to allow any man even to look upon a married lady, the king would no





more see his concubines whom Absalom had visited, but shut them up for life.

Then David ordered Amasa, his new general-in-chief, to collect an army in three days, and go after Sheba. But Amasa, not making as much despatch as he wished, he feared that Sheba would get a strong force and make head against him; and secure himself in a fortress. So he desired Abishai to take his body guards and pursue him.

The troops were to assemble at the great stone in Gibeon, about five miles from Jerusalem. Here Amasa went before them as their general. Joab was along with his brother Abishai, and he had a most wicked design in his head. He girt his coat about him that that might not hang in his way, and girt his belt upon his coat, that his sword might be the readier for him; he then put his sword in a sheath too big for it, that whenever he pleased, it might, upon a little shake, fall out, as it were by accident; and so he might take it into his hand unsuspected, as if he were going to return it into the scabbard, when he designed to sheath it in the bowels of Amasa. And Joab went up to Amasa and inquired after his health,—and, according to the Eastern custom, still used among the Turks and Arabs,—he took Amasa by the beard with his right hand, to kiss him. But Amasa never observed that Joab held his sword in his left hand, which he had just let fall and picked up; “so he smote” Amasa “therewith in the fifth rib, and shed out his bowels to the ground.” In this way God permitted Amasa to be punished, for rebelling against David, the Lord’s anointed; but the conduct of Joab was of a piece with his character; he was a cruel, deceitful, and overbearing man, and in the end he met with a just reward for his crimes.

After Amasa was slain, Joab placed a soldier by his body, to let the people know as they passed, that though Amasa was slain, he, Joab, had taken the command of the army for David, so those who were for David might go after him. The people were, however, so horror-struck at the sight of their general, wallowing in his blood in the high way, that the men removed him, and covered the body over with a cloth that it might not be seen, and then all the people went forward in pursuit of Sheba.





Sheba, as David had apprehended, had taken refuge in a strong place called Abel. Here Joab and Abner cast up a very high bank, on which to place war-engines to break down the walls, which were surrounded by a trench.

While Joab's soldiers were battering the wall, a wise woman—one renowned for giving prudent advice in difficulties—called from the walls with a loud voice, and asked to see Joab. Then she told him that Abel was a place well known for prudent people, and so, had he asked for a conversation with some of them before he began to beat it down, he might easily have settled the matter. Moreover, she asked him if he would destroy a city which was a mother in Israel, and was the protector of several other places, as a mother of her children; and also a part of the land which was the Lord's inheritance, not polluted by the heathen, but devoted to the service of God.

Joab replied, it was very far from his wishes to destroy the city, but there was a traitor there, and they must deliver him up. The woman agreed that his head should be cut off and thrown over the wall, and then told the citizens of the treaty she had made. The order was executed, and Joab sounded a retreat with the trumpet, and then returned to Jerusalem.

After David's return to his throne, Joab still remained commander-in-chief, Amasa being killed. Benaiah also commanded the body guard. Adoram was appointed to the new office of treasurer of the taxes. Jehoshaphat was still recorder. Sheva was yet scribe, and Zadok and Abiathar priests. Ira was also one of David's counsellors.

THE TWENTY-FIRST CHAPTER OF II. SAMUEL.

Saul's Sons executed.

“And they fell all seven together, and were put to death in the days of harvest; in the first days in the beginning of barley harvest.”—Ver. 9.

You remember that the Gibeonites deceived the Israelites in the days of Joshua, by appearing among them with clouted or patched





up shoes, and old clothes, and mouldy bread, as if they had worn out their dress with travelling, and as if their food had become stale owing to the distance of the way ; and so the Israelites mistook them for a people afar off, instead of inhabitants of Canaan, whom they were commanded to destroy. As the supposed inhabitants of a distant nation inclined to be at peace with them, the Israelites made a covenant not to hurt them ; and then they found out that they were not from a distance, but Amorites, whom they ought to have slain for their wickedness. However, they would not break their oath, having sworn not to injure them ; but they made them servants, “ hewers of wood, and drawers of water unto all the congregation.”

Now it happened in the days of David, that there was a famine for three years. David remarked this judgment, and was anxious to know for what particular sin God afflicted the people. Having “ inquired of the Lord ” by the Ephod, he found that the covenant with the Gibeonites had been broken : for Saul, in pretended zeal for the glory of God, had tried to destroy these people as a remnant of the Canaanites, and some of them had actually been slain. To break a solemn and deliberate oath is a very wicked thing, and as the nation seemed to have joined in it,—and especially Saul’s relatives,—and no atonement had been made, this punishment was inflicted till the sin was atoned.

So the king asked the Gibeonites what would satisfy them for the lives of their fellow-countrymen ; and they replied, the lives of seven of Saul’s sons.

Then David took two sons of Rizpah, the daughter of Aiah ; and five sons, so called, of Michal, but they were the sons of Adriel, who married her sister Merab ; and therefore, as her sister was dead, she had brought them up. And these young men were all hanged in the hill of Gibeah, “ before the Lord ; ” or to make atonement in the sight of the Lord. As God does not delight in human blood for sacrifice, and as sin could be atoned for by other means, the execution of these poor young men seems to have been a severe and unnecessary measure ; but as David inquired of the Lord, we may believe that he was directed what to do, and that he did not rashly sacrifice innocent lives. Perhaps





these sons of Saul had themselves been among the murderers of the unfortunate Gibeonites, and so justice overtook them at last.

Rizpah was deeply afflicted to lose her two sons in so painful a manner; she pitched a tent of sackcloth near their gibbets, and, no doubt, being aided by her friends and servants, she protected the dead bodies from ravenous birds and beasts of prey.

David, having no malicious feeling towards the deceased young men,—having let justice take its course,—had their bodies taken down, and together with the remains of Saul and Jonathan, which had been in the possession of the men of Jabesh-gilead, he had them honourably buried in the sepulchre of Kish, who was the father of Saul.

After this solemn execution, God was entreated for the land, and it yielded its usual harvest.

The Philistines still annoyed David; and he went out to battle in his old age, but he was now weak, and his life had nearly been taken by Ishbi-benob—supposed to have been a son of Goliath—who seeing David fighting feebly, went up to him to slay him, but David being quickly aided by Abishai, the giant was slain. This narrow escape of David made the people of Israel resolve that he should no more go out to battle, lest their glory should be extinguished by his death.

Several more battles afterwards took place between the Israelites and the Philistines, and several more giants were slain; one was called Saph; another was brother to Goliath; and another was of such unusual bulk, that he had more fingers and toes than other people, and of such insolence, that though he had seen the fall of the other giants, yet he defied Israel.





THE TWENTY-SECOND CHAPTER OF II. SAMUEL.

David's Psalm of Thanksgiving.

"And David spake unto the Lord the words of this song, in the day that the Lord had delivered him out of the hand of all his enemies, and out of the hand of Saul."—Ver. 1.

This chapter is a psalm of David, written by him to sing praises to God for delivering him out of the hands of his enemies. We should always be grateful to those who do us acts of kindness, but much more should we be grateful to God, who is constantly doing for us such acts of kindness as none besides can do.

You will find some words in this chapter which seem to be strangely used, but which, with a little attention, you will soon understand. They are what are called figures of speech, and are names of things common in the world—which David and other sacred writers of poetry gave to God himself, because those things very strikingly helped to describe certain qualities which belong to him.

I should have told you that the psalms are properly poetry, but being turned from Hebrew into English, they look more like prose in our language. Figures of speech may be used in prose, but in poetry they are of very common use.

Here God is called "a rock," "a fortress," "the God of my rock," "the horn of my salvation," "my high tower," "my refuge," as well as "my deliverer," and "my saviour," the two last of which you will readily understand without any more explanation.

A rock is a place of strength and security; hence, you recollect reading, that when the Benjamites were nearly destroyed by the vengeance of the other tribes, "six hundred men turned and fled to the wilderness, unto the rock Rimmon, and abode in the rock Rimmon four months;" so God is as a hiding-place, and a place of defence, to those that put their trust in him in time of danger,—he is their "rock."

He is also called their "*fortress*." Now the difference between the rock and the fortress is, that the rock is, as people often say,





as nature made it; that is, as God made it, without any art of man: but, the fortress is intended to strengthen the defence of the rock by being added to it, or to supply the place of a rock, by being built up where there is no rock. It is made of earth and stones, and in various forms, so as to make it difficult to approach or destroy it, and, of course, difficult to hurt those who have taken shelter in it. This, therefore, is another figure by which David would express his entire confidence in God as his protector.

But because one or two strong means of defence are not enough to show how secure they are who trust in God, David adds still more—to show that what means of defence soever we have got, God is as that defence; and God is as all our defences put together, if we look to him for help in trouble—he is, says David, “my high tower,” whence I can look down in safety upon my enemy, and where his weapons shall not harm me; and he is my refuge, where I may hide and he cannot find me; and he is “the God of my rock,” or of my strength, who supplies me with strength, which is as a rock; and he is “the horn of my salvation;” through whose strength I can push back my enemies, as a strong creature pushes his enemies back with his horns. David’s enemies were the wicked Philistines and others; but we have wicked enemies in those who would tempt us to sin; and it must be by God’s strength that we oppose them, trusting in him, like David, as in “the horn of our salvation;” so will God be our deliverer and our saviour.

David further says, “When the waves of death compassed me, the floods of ungodly men made me afraid; the sorrows of hell compassed me about; the snares of death prevented me; in my distress I called upon the Lord, and cried to my God; and he did hear my voice out of his temple, and my cry did enter into his ears.” This means, when death seemed ready to swallow him up—as the stormy waves often swallow up the poor sailor; and when wicked men surrounded him—like floods of water rushing upon him on all sides, from which it seemed impossible to escape; when, owing to his very great fears, his mind was in a state of torture, which seemed to be as violent as even the wicked suffer in hell; and when he seemed like the poor helpless bird caught





in the fowler's snare, with no hope of escaping from his foes—no sooner did he cry to God than God heard him, from heaven, which is called his temple, where he dwells, and is ever adored by his angels and saints; his bitter cry was not in vain, but reached his ears; not that God has ears as we have, but as our ears are the channels through which cries pass and attract our notice, so, when God attends to earnest prayers, they are said to enter into his ears.

David is thought here, while he spake of himself, also to have had his mind under a divine direction to show the sufferings and deliverance which, a long time after, should happen to Jesus Christ, whose reputed father, and whose mother, were both descended from David, and so Jesus was called "the Son of David:" Christ suffered the severest tortures—the pangs of death, and the wrath of God, for our sins, and was, at the same time, surrounded by the insulting scribes, priests, and people.

To show what terror God struck into David's enemies, how he made them afraid, and how he sets himself against the wicked who hurt or would hurt those who fear him, David now proceeds to use more figures, and very grand they are.

After he had prayed, God fought for him: "Then the earth shook and trembled: the foundations of heaven moved and shook because he was wroth;" that is, God swallowed up his enemies as with an earthquake, when the earth shakes and trembles, and when the awful thunder often seems to shake heaven itself, though in reality that is not touched.

David then says, "There went up a smoke out of his nostrils, and fire out of his mouth devoured; coals were kindled by it." Remember this is poetry, and this kind of language is all in what we call figures. God has not nostrils like us, nor is it usual for a great smoke to proceed from men's nostrils, but it is often usual for a volcano or burning mountain to send forth clouds of smoke as an earthquake, and to shoot out great volleys of fire: David thought of this at the time he wrote these words. Volcanoes have destroyed whole towns, and so God, when he appeared to save David, swept away his enemies as with the fire of a volcano.

"He bowed the heavens also and came down: and darkness





was under his feet." But, God is in all places at all times how then could he come down? And did he bring heaven down like a cloud upon the earth? No, you must still remember this is used like the former language, and means that, as we speed to a person we love, to save him from danger, so God came down, as it were to David's help, and his approach was awful as a thick darkness, while his coming was hidden from his enemies, though its effects were felt—they could not see God in his clouds, though they felt his power in their punishment.

And God came quickly too, as we should run to help a beloved friend; "he rode upon a cherub and did fly: and he was seen upon the wings of the wind." He came as if upon some swift angel, or as if he was borne downward by a rapid wind, which is one of the most speedy things in nature—so ready and speedy was God's help in the time of need.

"And he made darkness pavilions round about him, dark waters and thick clouds of the skies." As the dark cloud full of water would hide any object, so God was unseen by David's foes, though his faith, like an eye to his mind, saw all that God was doing to save him.

Amidst this darkness there was a brightness which David could behold, as the Israelites saw the bright side of that cloudy pillar that went before them in the wilderness, while it was all dark to their enemies. "Through the brightness before him were coals of fire kindled;" or his wrath was made to come upon the ungodly, like the fire and brimstone upon Sodom and Gomorrah. As men used to shoot out arrows in ancient warfare, so God sent out his judgments, like arrows, and scattered David's foes; and as the lightnings often dart forth and destroy man and beast, so he sent his lightning, and discomfited, or routed them. Moreover, as the Red Sea was dried up to save Israel from the Egyptians, and "the channels of the sea appeared," and they escaped, so God drew David out of the great waters of trouble that threatened to drown him.

Now, I think, you will pretty well understand this Psalm. We have reached the eighteenth verse, and from that to the twentieth, I hope you will want no particular help. There you will find





David comparing his trouble to darkness, because darkness is not pleasant; but he calls God his "lamp," because as a lamp at night removes darkness, so, in the night of sorrow, God makes his people happy. Then he tells of some escapes he had in cutting his way through his foes, and springing over some wall that seemed to stop his passage; or his language may mean, that he had escaped as wonderfully as he who should cut his way through a body of soldiers who designed to kill him, or, should leap away from them over a high wall, where they could not pursue him.

In the thirty-first verse, David calls God his "buckler," which was a kind of shield; then he says, there is "no rock,"—that is, no defence like him. If he had been strong to overcome his enemies, he it was who gave him strength—if he had been swift to flee from them, he it was who had made his feet "like hind's feet," or to seem as swift as the nimble stag. If he had been skilful in the art of war, all his wisdom came from God, for he could not have defeated his and Israel's foes, had not God taught his hands to war: and if he was secure like one raised on a strong rock, it was God had set him on his "high places."

Thus he was enabled to conquer his enemies, as though their necks were under his feet, and to overcome them as men trample over the mire in the street. Thus did David give all the glory of his deliverance to God.

In like manner did Christ obtain the victory over sin, death, and hell, and if we trust in him we shall at last be "more than conquerors through him that hath loved us."

"Hosanna to King David's son,
Who reigns on a superior throne!
We bless the prince of heavenly birth,
Who brings salvation down to earth."





THE TWENTY-THIRD CHAPTER OF II. SAMUEL.

David's Heroes.

"These be the names of the mighty men whom David had."—
Ver. 8.

In this chapter we have the last words of David; in which, among other things, he describes the character of a good king, who must be just—rule in the fear of God—and be a blessing to his people, as are the cheering light of the morning, and the herbage springing up from the earth for the use of man and beast.

Then follows a list of David's most famous soldiers, and the exploits which they did, which you may read from the eighth verse to the end. Adino slew eight hundred at one time with his spear—Eleazar defied the Philistines, as Goliath had Israel, and, while the other men of Israel fled, he stood his ground alone, and fought them, till his hand was so cramped that his sword was, as it were, fastened in it. "And the Lord wrought a great victory that day, and the people," who had fled, when they saw the victory he had gained, "returned after him, only to spoil" them that were slain, and to strip them of what they had.

Shammah met with a party of Philistines who were out plundering the fields, and he stood in the midst of a field of lentiles—a sort of pea—"and defended it, and slew the Philistines; and the Lord wrought a great victory:" for these exploits could not have been performed, had not God bestowed upon the men wonderful strength and courage to meet the enemies of Israel.

Three of David's heroes who attended him in his troubles, when he hid in the cave of Adullam, also performed a very great exploit. It being hot weather, David was very thirsty; and as there was a very nice well of water near the gate of Bethlehem, where the Philistines then were, he longed for some, and said, "Oh, that one would give me drink of the water of the well of Bethlehem, which is by the gate. And the three mighty men brake through the host of the Philistines" that were encamped before Bethlehem,





drew water from the well, and brought it to David. David, however, would not drink of it when they had got it for him ; it was kind in them to go when they heard him expressing his wish for the water ; but as they had risked their lives for it, he poured it out before the Lord. He thought water obtained on such terms was too dear for him to drink. We admire the love of these soldiers to their prince, but what was it to the love of Jesus Christ, who left heaven for us, took our nature to die for us, and then bled and gave up his precious life on the cross, that we might drink of the water of life, and partake of those joys which shall cheer the soul as water now relieves the thirst, and that for ever and ever.

Abishai was another brave man, and slew three hundred men at once. And Benaiah slew two Moabites that were as strong and bold as lions. He also slew a lion in a pit, in a time of snow, when lions are most fierce and hungry ; and he slew an Egyptian, "a goodly man, large and tall ;" and though he had a spear in his hand, he met him with nothing but a staff, and overcame him.

Do not let us mistake here ; this history is not told us to teach us to fight, but only to show us what those men could do when engaged in a good cause ; and when God helped them against the wicked people who were the enemies of Israel.

THE TWENTY-FOURTH CHAPTER OF II. SAMUEL.

David's Pride in Numbering his People.

"For the king said to Joab the captain of the host, which was with him, Go now through all the tribes of Israel, from Dan even to Beer-sheba, and number all the people, that I may know the number of the people."—Ver. 2.

Again the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, for Satan moved David to number Israel and Judah, as we read in the twenty-first chapter of the first of Chronicles. Probably he





thought of making some conquests which God had not commanded, and wished to go in his strength, reckoning on the number of his troops, while he neither consulted the Ephod, nor trusted, as he ought, in God.

Ever the wicked Joab thought that David was doing a wrong thing, and tried to dissuade him from it, but he would have his own way. So after the land had been gone through in nine months and twenty days, "Joab gave up the sum of the number of the people to the king; and there were in Israel eight hundred thousand valiant men that drew the sword; and the men of Judah were five hundred thousand men."

When David had got the number of the people, his heart smote him that he had done what was wrong. He had perhaps felt proud to think what a number of soldiers he could collect, and what conquests he could make with them. But now he owns that in what he had done he had sinned. He had not asked from God direction, and he had acted like one who wished to do without him. And he earnestly prayed, "I beseech thee, O Lord, take away the iniquity of thy servant, for I have done very foolishly."

So God sent the prophet Gad to David, and told him he must choose one of three things: seven years of famine, or to flee for three months before his enemies, or to have three days of pestilence in the land. David desired to fall into the hands of God rather than into those of his enemies; and God sent a pestilence for three days, which swept away seventy thousand of his men!

David suffered by this, for it was a dreadful lessening of his strength, and so God humbled his pride. But let us not suppose that God destroyed the innocent on this occasion. It seems most likely that, owing to their conquests, Israel had become proud also; and so God, who hates pride, punished them in this manner.

God employed a particular divine messenger to produce this pestilence, and as he was about to destroy Jerusalem, he stopped him. "And the angel of the Lord was by the threshing-place of Araunah the Jebusite." And when David saw the angel, he again confessed his own sin, but pleaded that the people, who were as sheep under his care, were not guilty of his sin; and entreated that they might not be punished, but that the punishment might





fall upon him. God, however, knew that they had sinned as well as David.

Gad now advised David to build an altar to the Lord in the threshing-floor. And David went to Araunah to buy the threshing-floor, to build the altar that the plague might be stayed.

And Araunah offered to give him oxen, and the threshing instruments for wood for the sacrifice. But David would not use them till they were paid for, for the sacrifice would otherwise have been Araunah's, and not David's.

So David bought the threshing-floor and the oxen, and built "an altar unto the Lord, and offered burnt-offerings, and peace-offerings; so the Lord was entreated for the land, and the plague was stayed from Israel."







I GAT ME MEN SINGERS, ETC.



THE FIRST BOOK OF KINGS,

OR,

THE HISTORY OF THE KINGS OF JUDAH AND ISRAEL.

THE FIRST CHAPTER OF I. KINGS.

Adonijah's Conspiracy—Solomon proclaimed King.

"And Zadok the priest took an horn of oil out of the tabernacle, and anointed Solomon: and they blew the trumpet, and all the people said, God save King Solomon."—Ver. 39.

KING DAVID was now grown quite an old man; he was almost seventy years of age, for he began to reign when he was thirty years old, and he reigned forty years; and the account in this chapter brings us nearly to the end of his reign. You remember how active he was when he fought Goliath, and escaped from Saul, and beat the different enemies of Israel; but now it is said, "King David was old, and stricken in years," bent down with age. "And they covered him with clothes, but he gat no heat;" even his bed, which is the warmest place when we are cold, gave him no warmth. So death was chilling his life, and hurrying him into the grave. It was, then, very wise in Solomon to say, "Remember thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I





have no pleasure in them." You may think it long before you will be old, but if you live to the age of David you will wonder, on looking back, to think how soon your life has passed away. Then give the best of your days to the service of God, and be sure that your old age, though it will make you feeble in body, will find you happy in mind.

At this time David's counsellors recommended David a young wife, thinking that her company would make David more cheerful. And he married Abishag, a Shunammite: "But the king knew her not"—he took no delight in her, but she was to him as a stranger.

You have heard what bad sons Amnon and Absalom turned out, and now here is another son of David, who was not less wicked, "Adonijah, the son of Haggith." He was a spoiled child, "and his father had not displeased him at any time, in saying, Why hast thou done so?" He had never found fault with him when he did anything that was wrong; and so, says good Mr. Henry, "He in return made a fool of his father: because he was old and confined to his bed, he thought no notice was to be taken of him, and therefore exalted himself, and said, *I will be king*. Children that are indulged learn to be proud and ambitious, and that is the ruin of a great many young people."

In order to effect his designs, Adonijah "prepared him chariots and horsemen, and fifty men to run before;" these were to make him appear grand, to wait upon him, and to fight for him. He also gained over Joab, David's famous general, and Abiathar, the high-priest. But there were three chief men who were faithful to David, and these Adonijah could not get to use him ill; these were Zadok, the priest, and Benaiah, a brave soldier, and Nathan, the prophet, together with some others, and especially David's mighty men.

And Adonijah "slew sheep, and oxen, and fat cattle, to make a feast of them at a place called En-rogel, and there he enticed all the king's sons, excepting Solomon, and many of the king's servants."

Nathan, the prophet, lost no time in letting Solomon's mother, Bath-sheba, know what was doing; for, like all ladies in the East,





she lived quite in retirement, and was ignorant of Adonijah's conduct. He advised her to go directly to the king, and tell him all about it—or Solomon, to whom David intended to give the crown, would certainly lose it, and he and his mother would both perish; for cruel deeds have often been done, particularly in the East, by those who have got their crowns in an unfair way, lest the right heirs should rise against them, and obtain their rights.

So Bath-sheba went to the king, and told him all that happened, and reminded him that he had said that Solomon should reign, and not Adonijah, and begged him at once to have his successor proclaimed. And while she was speaking, Nathan contrived to go in to the king also, and so to urge him the more forcibly, to make no delay in so important a business.

Then David told Bath-sheba, that he would certainly not break his word, which every good man ought to keep, and, therefore, what he had promised should instantly be done.

And he ordered Zadok, and Nathan, and Benaiah, to take his servants with them, and cause Solomon to ride upon his mule,—which would otherwise have been treason,—and to go to Gihon, a place where there were wells or waters, where many people would be assembled;—there the priest and the prophet were to anoint Solomon king, by pouring oil upon his head according to custom, and to blow the trumpet, and say, “God save King Solomon.”

So they did as David told them; “and all the people said, God save King Solomon. And all the people came up after him, and the people piped with pipes, and rejoiced with great joy, so that the earth rent with the sound of them.”

The news soon came to Adonijah that Solomon was proclaimed king, for he had but just done feasting, when Joab heard the sound of the trumpet, and asked what was the cause of it; then Jonathan, the son of Abiathar the priest, arrived with the tidings, and mentioned, as the last act of Solomon's coming to the crown, that he sat upon his father's throne.

All Adonijah's guests were now in a terrible fright, and ran away to their homes. As for this wicked son, he feared that Solomon would do to him, as he would have done to Solomon, had





he got the throne ; and, lest he should be instantly killed, he fled away to the tabernacle, and laid hold on the horns of the altar, which was always a place of refuge, it being thought a great crime to kill any one there,—nor did he move from his place till Solomon gave his solemn word that his life should not be taken away. However, though Solomon sent for him and saved him for that time, yet he was to behave better in future or take the consequences. “If,” said Solomon, “he will show himself a worthy man,” and never cause any more disturbance, “there shall not an hair of him fall to the earth ; but if wickedness shall be found in him,” and he does any more such bad deeds, “he shall die.”

Then Solomon told him to go home ; meaning, that he was to have nothing to do at court, and that in future, if he would save himself, he must keep himself quiet.

THE SECOND CHAPTER OF I. KINGS.

The Death of David.—The Execution of Adonijah, of Joab, and of Shimei.

“So David slept with his fathers, and was buried in the city of David.”—Ver. 10.

David, finding himself near death, gave Solomon the best advice he could about managing his kingdom, for he was yet but young,—about twenty years of age ; and as David knew he was wise and good, he hoped he would continue so, and, though a child in years, be a man in behaviour. Especially he told him to walk in God’s ways, and keep his commandments, and then he might be sure that God would bless him, and establish his throne.

But there were several things which David had left undone, and he commanded Solomon not to fail to do them.

Joab had been a bad man, and had not only ill-used David as the Lord’s anointed, and disobeyed his commands in slaying Absalom, but he had cruelly and deceitfully murdered Abner and Amasa, as we have before read—“and shed the blood of war in





peace, and put the blood of war upon his girdle that was about his loins, and in his shoes that were on his feet ;” he stabbed them while he pretended to embrace them, so that their blood gushed out on his girdle, and fell into his shoes. Now David ought to have punished Joab before, but his kingdom was often disturbed, and he perhaps feared the making of fresh enemies : he, however, did not forget that he as a king, must do justice, and now, with his throne, he transfers his commands to Solomon to execute this wicked man. “ Do, therefore, according to thy wisdom, and let not his hoar head go down to the grave in peace.”

Shimei had also been a base disturber, and had cursed David when he was in trouble, but, as he had promised to spare his life, he had kept his word ; however, his son must guard against him as a dangerous subject, and he would find occasion to visit him at last with the punishment of death.

While David thus remembered to do justice, he also thought of mercy, and was not ungrateful to Barzillai, the Gileadite, who had been very kind to him in his need ; and he ordered Solomon to treat Barzillai's sons with great kindness in return, and to let them be provided for, and have the honour of eating at his table.

“ So David slept with his fathers,” for death is but a long sleep for the body, which is to rise again, as we do in the morning, after having been as if dead during the night. And David “ was buried in the city of David. And the days that David reigned over Israel were forty years : seven years reigned he in Hebron, and thirty and three years reigned he in Jerusalem.”

David had not long been dead when Adonijah again plotted against his brother Solomon, and very cunningly went to Bathsheba, Solomon's mother, and asked her to beg of Solomon to let him marry Abishag, his father David's last wife. Now this request was altogether bad, and it proved that he wanted to make himself more great, and so to increase his power. So Solomon ordered him to be executed as a traitor, and Benaiah slew him. Abiathar, the priest, was also probably in this plot, or Solomon would not, as he did, have ordered him instantly to be banished to Anathoth ; and in thrusting out Abiathar from the priestly office, he fulfilled the threatening of God against the sons of Eli.





God had told Eli that the priesthood should depart from his house, and Abiathar, the last of his house, was now, for his crimes, made to bring the threatening to pass. So will all the threatenings of God against the wicked certainly come to pass at last.

But, before we go on further, pray stop to observe what a good son Solomon was to his mother. When she went in to plead for Adonijah, as he requested, Solomon, though a king, did not forget that she was his mother: he rose up to her, bowed himself to her, and set her at his right hand, which was the place of the greatest honour. Mr. Henry, whom we have just mentioned, in admiring this good son, observes: "Children, not only when grown up, but when grown great, must give honour to their parents, and carry themselves dutifully and respectfully towards them. *'Despise not thy mother when she is old.'*"

But, perhaps, you will observe, that when Bath-sheba spoke to Solomon, he promised that he would not say "nay" to her request, and then directly denied it. It must, however, be supposed, that he never thought of a request from his mother which would be likely to deprive him both of his crown and his life, and her of her life also; and it is likely that when she saw what a dangerous thing she had asked, she released Solomon from his word, or he thought himself released, as the request was so unreasonable and wicked.

One learned writer,—whose thoughts on this subject I have read,—is of opinion that Adonijah was cruelly used by Solomon, and that he had no wicked design in asking to marry Abishag; and he is very angry with those who think the contrary; but Solomon was a very good young man, and very wise, and he would not have ordered Adonijah to be slain without a just reason; his also punishing the others, whom he thought parties in the treason, shows that he had good cause to act as he did.

The alarm of Joab, who now fled for safety to the horns of the altar, showed, too, that he had good reason to dread Solomon's vengeance; and, though this was a very sacred place, yet, so great a criminal was this man, that the king ordered him not to be allowed to shelter himself even there, and "Benaiah, the son of Jehoiada, went up, and fell upon him, and slew him; and he was





buried in his own house in the wilderness." Thus was this wicked man punished at last.

The next criminal that we read of in this chapter was Shimei.

Solomon, having been warned about him by his father, sent for him, and told him to go and live at Jerusalem, but, if he ever ventured to leave that place, he would punish him with death. Shimei, who perhaps felt that he deserved death then, for his conduct towards the Lord's anointed, David, was very well pleased with this order, which, having sworn to observe, he went to Jerusalem and lived there for three years. At the end of that time, two of his servants "ran away unto Achish, son of Maachah, king of Gath," and Shimei, either forgetting his oath in his eagerness to get back his servants, or thinking himself secure after so long a time, rashly ventured to ride off to Achish, and returned with his servants. Solomon, being informed of this, sent for Shimei, told him of his wickedness in breaking a sacred oath, of his disobedience to his royal command, of his past behaviour to his father, which merited death, and of the justice of his sentence, and then ordered Benaiah to slay him.

Whether Benaiah executed the guilty persons we have read of with his own hands, or whether he was merely the officer who was to see that they were to be put to death, we do not exactly know; however, it is not absolutely necessary to understand by his falling upon the criminals and slaying them that he did so himself; he might be said to do it, if, as Solomon's officer of justice, he took care to see it done.

Thus, having punished these wicked and troublesome characters, "the kingdom was established in the hand of Solomon."

Benaiah was now made chief captain in the room of Joab, and Zadok priest in the room of Abiathar. All things were peaceful at home, and no surrounding enemy dared to attack the wise and prosperous Solomon.





THE THIRD CHAPTER OF I. KINGS.

Solomon's Marriage to Pharaoh's Daughter—His Striking Dream and Prayer for Wisdom—His wonderful Judgment.

"And Solomon loved the Lord, walking in the statutes of David his father."—Ver. 3.

Solomon now chose a wife, who was no less a person than the daughter of Pharaoh, the then powerful king of Egypt, a country near Canaan. This, you know, was a very long time after the reign of the Pharaoh who lived when Israel left Egypt. It was four hundred and seventy-seven years after—but still a Pharaoh reigned, for this was a common name given to the kings of Egypt, as Czar is now to the emperors of Russia. The Egyptians were heathen, but it is said by the Jews that Pharaoh's daughter embraced the Jewish religion when Solomon married her, for it would have been a wicked thing in him, and contrary to the command of God, to have married a heathen.

At this time the Jews had no temple, and they worshipped on the high places or hills, among which was Gibeon, where the tabernacle was, and here Solomon went and offered a thousand burnt-offerings.

While Solomon was at Gibeon, he had a remarkable dream, and God appeared to him in the dream, and said to him, "Ask what I shall give thee?" And Solomon said, "I am but a little child," meaning that he knew but very little, and asked God to give him wisdom. God was pleased with Solomon's humility, for he is always pleased with the humble: and he told Solomon that as he had asked neither long life, nor riches, nor to conquer his enemies, but had asked only for wisdom, he would give him "a wise and an understanding heart" beyond every one beside; indeed, there never was nor ever again should be so wise a man in the world. He should also have what he had not asked—he would make him more rich and honourable than all other kings, and, if he did but keep his commandments, he would also add to these enjoyments that of a good old age.





This dream was one of those extraordinary ones by which God did at that time, and long after, sometimes tell his mind to men; and Solomon had a persuasion that it was more than a common dream, and that it would all turn out to be true. So he went to Jerusalem, and there, in token of his gratitude to God, he "offered up burnt-offerings," and made a feast to all his servants, which was probably out of the peace-offerings he had presented, as was often usual.

Solomon's wisdom was now soon tried. Two women, that were harlots, or inn-keepers, lived in one house, and both of them had little infants. It happened that one of them smothered her poor little infant, by lying on it while she was asleep. So, what did she do, but went to the bed of the other woman, and changed the dead child for the living one that she found lying in the bosom of its mother; and as the other mother was fast asleep, she knew nothing about it till she awoke in the morning. When she awoke she discovered how she had been cheated, and went to Solomon to make her complaint. Each, in his presence, declared the child belonged to her, and words ran very high. "The other woman said, Nay; but the living is my son, and the dead is thy son. And this said, No; but the dead is thy son, and the living is my son. Thus they spake before the king."

This must have puzzled any other judge; for how was it possible to know which to believe? However, the king soon settled the matter. "Bring me a sword," said he; "and they brought a sword before the king. And the king said, Divide the living child in two, and give half to the one, and half to the other."

You are perhaps ready to cry out, Why, surely Solomon would not be so cruel! No, he did not intend to be cruel; he knew what would be likely to happen to help him to judge aright. As soon as the real mother supposed that her child was to be cut to pieces, rather than it should be killed, she was willing to give it up, and she instantly cried out, "O my lord, give her the living child, and in no wise slay it." But the other said, "Let it be neither mine nor thine, but divide it" which no real mother would have said, for kind mothers love their children too well to be so cruel.





Solomon then directly saw which was the mother, and he said, "Give her the living child, and in no wise slay it; she is the mother thereof."

You may suppose how gratefully she took, and how warmly she pressed, her infant to her bosom; how her tears were turned into smiles, and her heaviness into joy. The people, too, were all delighted to see the kind mother recovering her dear infant. "And all Israel heard of the judgment which the king had judged, and they feared," that is, honoured, "the king—for they saw that the wisdom of God was in him, to do judgment."

THE FOURTH CHAPTER OF I. KINGS.

Solomon's Prosperity and Honour.

"And Solomon reigned over all kingdoms from the river unto the land of the Philistines, and unto the border of Egypt; they brought presents and served Solomon all the days of their life."—Ver. 21.

Solomon was now king over all Israel, which his father was not when he began to reign, for he was then only king over Judah; and, as we shall find by and by, Solomon's son was not, for his kingdom was divided.

In this chapter we find a list of his chief officers; besides which, he had twelve officers, one for each month in the year, who took care to provide food for his great household; and one of these, "the son of Abinadab,"—who was probably a very industrious and diligent officer,—was honoured by Solomon's giving him his own daughter Tappath, as his wife; so that he became the king's son-in-law.

And now "Judah and Israel were many, as the sand which is by the sea in multitude;" they had no war and no pestilence to lessen their large numbers, and still kept increasing. And so God blessed them, and they were "eating and drinking, and making





merry," cheerfully enjoying the good things which God kindly bestowed upon them.

And though Solomon was only king of Judah and Israel, yet he received tribute from many other kingdoms around him, and in this way might be said to reign over them also ; for, the princes and people of those kingdoms "brought presents, and served him all the days of their life."

Think how numerous Solomon's household and attendants must have been, when his provision for one day only "was thirty measures of fine flour," each measure being more than seventy-five gallons ; "and three-score measures of meal ; ten fat oxen ; and twenty oxen out of the pastures," which were not fatted ; "and an hundred sheep, besides harts, and roe-bucks, and fallow-deer, and fatted fowl." So that they had plenty of beef from the oxen, mutton from the sheep, and venison from the harts, bucks, and deer. All this quantity of daily provision being put together, it has been reckoned that, at least nearly fifty thousand persons must have been fed daily at the palace of the Israelitish king ! Most probably, among these were included his guards, each of whom received a *ration*, or soldier's portion, from the king's store.

Every man now dwelt safely "under his vine, and under his fig-tree," which grew around the dwellings to afford shelter from the sun, and which were principal trees in the land of Judah ; and "from Dan even to Beer-sheba,"—the two extreme parts of the land,—the people enjoyed this blessing all the days of Solomon.



"And Solomon had forty thousand stalls of horses for his chariots, and twelve thousand horsemen." Besides these, he had also swift dromedaries, that might

go post for him, and all these were constantly well supplied with barley and straw.





“God gave Solomon wisdom and understanding, exceeding much, and largeness of heart,” that is, a capacity of mind to know every thing ; so that what he knew seemed countless, “even as the sand that is on the sea-shore.” “And Solomon’s wisdom excelled the wisdom of all the children of the East country,” or people of the East countries—so called, just as the Israelites were called the children of Israel : and it also excelled “all the wisdom of Egypt.” He must, then, have been wise indeed, for the Arabians and Persians, who were among the children of the East, were famous for wisdom ; and Egypt was so renowned for it, that philosophers, or men esteemed already wise, even went there, from other countries, to get more wise,—for Egypt was called the mother of the arts and sciences ; all clever kinds of inventions having had their origin there. “And he spake three thousand proverbs : and his songs were a thousand and five.” Proverbs are wise sayings ; many of which are to be found in the book so called, and written by him ; and, besides these, he wrote a number of poems. “And he spake of trees, from the cedar-tree that is in Lebanon,” which is a large and noble tree, one of the finest in the world, “even unto the hyssop that springeth out of the wall,” the lowest and least herb. So that he understood trees and plants of all sorts and sizes between the greatest and the least ; or, in other words, he was wonderfully skilled in what is now called botany. “He spake also of beasts, and of fowl, and of creeping things, and of fishes.” He understood the nature of all sorts of animals in the earth, air, and sea, and discoursed of their names, kinds, qualities, and use, with the greatest ease ; so that he was a complete master of what is called natural history. And this is the more wonderful, because even the wisest men, who now study these things with constant attention, can only take some one part of them in order to be master of it—one fixing on insects, of which the numbers are astonishing ; another on birds ; another on beasts ; another on fish ; and so for the rest.

No wonder that “there came of all people, to hear the wisdom of Solomon, from all kings of the earth, which had heard of his wisdom.”





THE FIFTH CHAPTER OF I. KINGS.

Preparation for Building the Temple.

“And, behold, I purpose to build an house unto the name of the Lord my God, as the Lord spake unto David my father, saying, Thy son, whom I will set upon thy throne in thy room, he shall build an house unto my name.”—Ver. 5.

As soon as Solomon was fixed upon his throne, Hiram, king of Tyre, sent ambassadors to him, to congratulate him on his peace and prosperity. Solomon took the opportunity of sending a letter back by the ambassadors, to inform Hiram that he intended to build a temple for the worship of God, which the troublous times of his father's reign had prevented from being done; but now, all the enemies of Israel having been put under the soles of his father's feet—that is, in other words, being conquered as one trampled upon, and there being “rest on every side,” he would not delay to complete so grand a design. But he wanted some help from Hiram. There were very fine cedar trees, a most durable wood for building, which grew on that part of Lebanon belonging to Hiram, and he would be glad if he would have them cut down for his use; and, moreover, that he would let him have some of his men to work on them; for the Sidonians, who were a part of his subjects, were very skilful in hewing timber.

So Hiram, who was very friendly towards Solomon, promised to do as he wished; and this was a very important point gained towards building the temple, for the Jews were mostly employed in agriculture—that is, ploughing, sowing, and reaping the fruits of the earth, and knew little about the art of fine building, or even of hewing down trees, which, to be done well, should be done at a particular time, and in a certain way, and then they should undergo some preparations to make them fit for use.

Hiram having kept his word, Solomon paid him for his trees and workmen's wages, by giving him what was needed in his country, where, though the people were skilled in growing and





working timber, they did not so well understand how to grow the fruits of the earth. "And Solomon gave Hiram twenty thousand measures of wheat for food to his household, and twenty measures of pure oil; thus gave Solomon to Hiram year by year." These measures are not of the same sort as ours, but have been carefully reckoned, and amount to twelve millions nine hundred and sixty thousand pounds of wheat, and twenty-one thousand six hundred pounds of oil; so that Hiram was very well paid, and this pay was given every year, as long as the temple was in building, and some think afterwards continued as long as Hiram lived.

Besides the help of Hiram's men, Solomon employed thirty thousand Israelites, ten thousand of whom worked every month in turns; so that each one was one month in a quarter of a year labouring for Solomon, and two months at home looking after his own grounds and family. This was very kind and considerate, and showed that he was not a tyrant of a king, who would have allowed them no time for themselves: and he employed Adoniram "over the levy," that is, over those men who, being got together by the king's orders, were called "a levy;" and Adoniram had to see that they did their duty, and rested in their turns.

So Solomon had "threescore and ten," that is, seventy thousand men, that "bare burdens," or carried stones from the mountains out of which they were dug; and "eighty thousand hewers in the mountains," that dug the stones out of the quarries, and made them into proper shapes; and he employed three thousand three hundred officers, to overlook them, and see that none were careless or idle.

"And the king commanded, and they brought great stones, and costly stones," such as fine marble, "and hewed stones to lay the foundation of the house." "So they prepared timber and stones to build the house," or temple.





THE SIXTH CHAPTER OF I. KINGS.

The Building of the Temple.

“So Solomon built the house and finished it.”—Ver. 14.

“In the fourth year of Solomon’s reign he commenced the building of the temple.” The house which king Solomon built for the Lord was thirty-six yards long, twelve wide, and eighteen high, but to this were added courts and colonnades where the people might assemble to perform their devotions, and assist at the sacrifices, without being exposed to the open air. So that the whole put together was a very grand object.

There was one very remarkable thing in the building of this temple: “The house, when it was in building, was built of stone made ready before it was brought thither; so that there was neither hammer nor axe, nor any tool of iron heard in the house while it was in building.” The joints were all made by the clever workmen, God blessing them particularly in this work with more than usual skill, so that each joint fitted exactly into the one for which it was made, and required nothing more than a wooden mallet, at most, to fit it in its place. This temple is mentioned in Scripture, as a type or likeness of heaven,—that is, it was a place for serving God, and where God particularly blessed his people, and so is heaven; and this curious fact, about the stones all fitting without any more noise and labour, had its meaning, and may remind us that all those who are to be pillars in the temple of God above, or to remain there fixed for ever, must be first made fit for it; and this they are by the Holy Spirit of God making them holy, for nothing that is defiled or wicked can enter there.

If you read the chapter you will, perhaps, find a few things which you cannot understand. We are told that “the cedar of the house within was carved with knops and open flowers.” What are knops? They are said to have been ornaments of the shape of an egg.





And then we read of the preparing of "the oracle." The oracle was a place where God, in a wonderful way, spoke his mind and will, as one man speaks to another.

You must also observe that there was a great quantity of gold used in the building: "So Solomon overlaid the house within with pure gold: and he made a partition by the chains of gold before the oracle; and he overlaid it with gold. And the whole house he overlaid with gold, until he had finished all the house: also the whole altar that was by the oracle, he overlaid with gold." "And the floor of the house he overlaid with gold within and without."

Solomon also made two cherubims of olive tree, a tree that grows commonly in that part of the world where Judea was. These cherubims were tall and large figures, with widely-extended wings, and they stood in the oracle, and are supposed to have been emblems of angels, who always wait God's commands, and, like winged creatures, are swift in their motions to do his will. These, too, were overlaid with gold. The whole of this golden work may teach us—as gold is the purest of metals—that the place where God will be to give his blessing, and the persons who acceptably serve him, must all be pure and holy.

This temple was begun in the fourth year of Solomon's reign, and finished in the eleventh; "so was he seven years in building it."

A curious calculation has been made respecting the immense amount which this temple cost, which may give you some idea of its value;—the amount was about four billions, six hundred and ninety-six millions, four hundred and ninety-eight thousand, four hundred and thirty-five dollars; and the weight, forty-six thousand tons. Suppose that the above amount were to be removed from one place to another in wagons, every wagon to be laden with four tons, it would require eleven thousand five hundred wagons to contain it.

If every wagon were drawn by four horses, allowing the space of twenty yards to every wagon and horses, the line would reach nearly one hundred and thirty-one miles.

If the amount of the expenditure were coined into half-eagles,





or pieces of five dollars value, and they were placed on a plane close to each other, allowing one inch to every half-eagle, they would extend fourteen thousand eight hundred and twenty-four miles.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER OF I. KINGS.

Solomon's Houses—The Ornaments and Utensils for the Temple.

“And Solomon made all the vessels that pertained to the house of the Lord.”—Ver. 48.

After Solomon had built a house for God, and served him first, he then erected one for himself; but he did not make that haste to get it completed which he did to complete the temple, for it took thirteen years in building. “He built also the house of the forest of Lebanon,” which, from the account given of it in this chapter, was larger than the temple; and this was necessary, as only the priests went into the temple to perform the services, whereas into this went, not only Solomon's family, but his courtiers, and nobles, and all foreign ambassadors, and whoever had any business with him, which required various rooms to receive them in. This house took its name from its being built of wood of the cedars of Lebanon, and is thought by some to have been Solomon's summer house, where he could get cool and refreshing air when the weather was exceedingly hot.

“Solomon made also an house for Pharaoh's daughter, whom he had taken to wife:” and some think that Solomon's dwelling-house, the house of the forest of Lebanon, and that of Pharaoh's daughter, all stood close to each other,—the house of Lebanon being that where Solomon went to administer justice, if any of his subjects had been wronged or ill-treated.

“And king Solomon sent and fetched Hiram out of Tyre;” not the king, but a man of the same name, who is more particularly described in the next verse: “He was a widow's son of the tribe of Naphtali, his father was a man of Tyre;” his mother was,





therefore, a Jewess, but his father a Tyrian, though some think not a native Tyrian, but a Jew that resided there, and so got the name. He was "a worker in brass;" or, as we should have called him, a coppersmith: "and he was filled with wisdom and understanding, and cunning to work all works in brass;" that is, he was very skilful. "And he came to king Solomon, and wrought all his work."

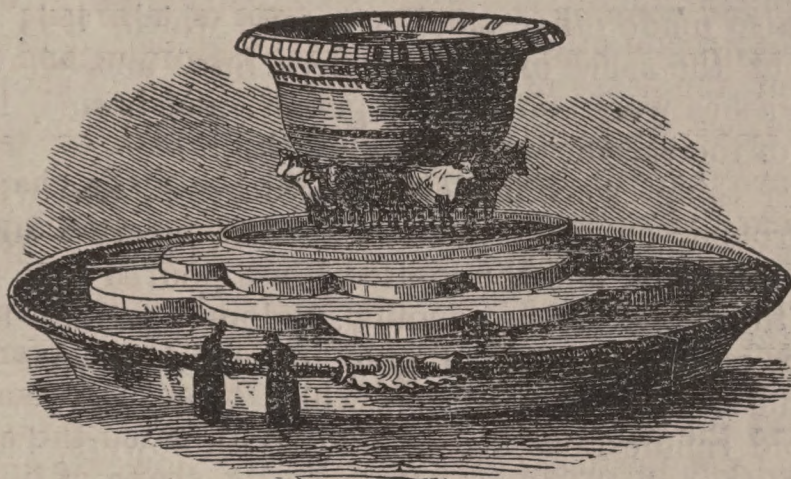
"He cast two pillars of brass," eighteen cubits, or ten yards high, and more than six yards round. And he made chapiters to set upon them; these were large ovals made something like a crown, to set upon the tops of the pillars. And he made nets of chequer-work, that is, work very much varied in its forms—and these are said to have been ornaments like thick branches of trees: "and wreaths of chain-work," like fringes, as some think, twisting round the chapiters. He also ornamented the chapiters with "lily-work," or ornaments made in the shape of lilies. To these ornaments he also added two hundred in the shape of pomegranates. You remember, ornaments like this Eastern fruit adorned the dress of the high priest. "And he set up the pillars at the porch of the temple," and called the right pillar "Jachin," and the left "Boaz;" or rather, Solomon gave them their names. These names had meanings of importance: "Jachin" means, he will establish; and "Boaz" means, in strength; signifying, that as long as God was worshipped there in purity, the building should be established in strength.

Then he made "a molten sea," the size of which you may guess, by remembering the length of a man's arm from the elbow to the end of his fingers, which you have before observed, was that of a cubit. And this sea was ten such lengths across it. This was a large vessel, which, on account of the great quantity of water it held, was called "a sea," for it was capable of holding about three thousand baths, as the measures were then called: that is, about four hundred and fifty of our hogsheads, which you know are very large casks of themselves: what then must a vessel be which would hold four hundred and fifty times what they could contain! You will read in the chapter, that "under the brim of it round about, there were knops compassing it, ten in a cubit." These





knops were a sort of ornament so called, something like the shape of an egg, and were, perhaps, cocks out of which the water was turned, and of these there were six hundred! This sea, as it



might well be called, stood upon twelve oxen, cast in the same way, with their faces all turned towards the outside, and their mouths, also, might be used as spouts or cocks to let out the water. This vessel was as strong as it was large, for it was "a hand-breadth thick," so that a man's hand might be laid flat upon the edge any where round it. And it contained two thousand baths, so that, though it would hold more, it was not necessary to fill it, which might have caused inconvenience. This vessel was for the priests to wash themselves, and, as most of the things of the temple had a hidden meaning in them, and referred to spiritual blessings which should be enjoyed from Jesus Christ, it is considered as an emblem of him who is called, among other names, "the Fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness," because his blood, believed in as shed for sinners, cleanses the soul from guilt and sin, as water cleanses the body.

"And he made ten bases of brass," or, as we should call them, pedestals, or stands, with wheels to them; and he made "ten lavers," or basins, "of brass, each laver holding forty baths," or about seven gallons, and being four cubits across: and he set the





lavers on the bases or stands, which, having wheels, could be easily moved about as they were wanted : these were used for the priests to wash their burnt-offerings in. The bases were finely ornamented with cherubims, lions, and palm-trees, and all were cast in one mould, and exactly of the same size.

Hiram also made other smaller lavers, which, it is said, were used to put the ashes of the sacrifices into, and shovels, with which the ashes were collected together, and basins, to receive the blood of the sacrifices and sprinkle it.

All these things were made of bright brass, and were cast in the clay ground, or in the plain of Jordan, where a large mould was made for them, and the melted brass poured in.

Beside the things already named, Solomon made—that is, ordered to be made—an altar of gold, on which incense was to be offered ; and a table of gold, on which to set the shew-bread ; and ten gold candlesticks, ornamented with flowers, having each seven lamps, making seventy lights, and tongs of gold, which were used to take the wicks out of the oil, and put into the lamps ; and bowls to keep the oil in ; and snuffers to trim the lamps ; and basins to catch the blood of the sacrifices ; and spoons to hold the incense ; and censers of pure gold, with which to carry the coals from one altar to another, and on which the incense was burnt ; and hinges of gold for the doors.

Lastly, Solomon laid up in the temple all the treasure that remained, and would use none for himself ; and this might serve for purchasing sacrifices, and repairing the house of the Lord.

This temple soon perished, and its worshippers died. It retained its splendour only about thirty-four years, when Shishak, king of Egypt, took Jerusalem, and carried away the treasures of the temple ; and, after having been pillaged at other different times, it was finally burnt and plundered by the Chaldeans, under Nebuchadnezzar, having stood altogether only about four hundred years.







SOLOMON'S SERVANTS HEWING THE CEDARS OF LEBANON.



THE EIGHTH CHAPTER OF I. KINGS.

The Dedication of the Temple.

“So the king and all the children of Israel dedicated the house of the Lord.”—Ver. 63.

The temple being finished, Solomon got together all the chief men of Israel, and they attended the priests who brought the ark from out of the place where it had remained in David's time, in the city of David, and placed it in the temple. There, also, they put the materials of the old tabernacle used from the time of Moses, that they might never be employed for any common purposes; and all the holy vessels were carefully lodged there—that is, the candlestick, the shew-bread table, the incense altar, and other like things. And on this occasion king Solomon and the congregation of Israel sacrificed sheep and oxen in such numbers, that it is said, they “could not be told nor numbered for multitude;” meaning, by these words, not that they might not have been counted, but that it would have cost some labour to have reckoned them up, and that they were a very large number indeed. This was a way of expressing themselves quite common among the Jews.

The ark was put into that part of the temple called the oracle, the holy of holies, and the most holy place, where none but the high-priest might enter, and he but once a year; and it was covered over by the spread wings of the cherubims.

As soon as the priests had set down the ark, and come out of the most holy place, the Levites, who were singers, arrayed in fine linen and with musical instruments in their hands, stood at the east end of the altar of burnt-offering; and one hundred and twenty priests, blowing their trumpets, praised the Lord, together with the singers. Trumpets, cymbals, psalteries, and harps, were sounded in sweet and grand accord, and the singers sung in loud chorus, “Praise ye the Lord, for his mercy endureth for ever!” Oh, how delightful it must have been to have seen these sights, and heard these sounds! God was pleased with the people's





praises, for now "the cloud filled the house of the Lord,"—that token of the Divine presence which Israel so often saw in the days of Moses. And "the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud: for the glory of the Lord had filled the house of the Lord." More particulars of this interesting event may be found in the fifth chapter of the Second Book of Chronicles. But let it turn our thoughts to reflect for a moment on that blessed state when all the saints that have ever lived shall unite together in praising God, and when they shall see his glory for ever and ever; well may it fill the hearts of those who serve God here with the most lively hopes and the most cheerful joy.

When Solomon perceived that the glory of the Lord was present, beaming forth from out of the thick cloud in which it was veiled, he fell on his knees before the altar of burnt-offering, and before all the people; and he prayed a most devout and solemn prayer, spreading out his hands towards heaven, while all the people joined him with their minds, being in a standing posture. He earnestly thanked God for his mercies to his father David, and to himself, and then implored him to hear all the prayers that might be put up in that temple, in war, pestilence, famine, and all the variety of circumstances in which Israel might be placed: and having finished this beautiful prayer, as you find it in this chapter, he arose from his knees, and turning round to the congregation, blessed them all with a loud voice, and exhorted them to walk in God's ways, and keep his commandments.

Solomon having finished his prayer, now proceeded to offer sacrifice before the Lord; "and he offerd unto the Lord two and twenty thousand oxen, and an hundred and twenty thousand sheep." This was a wonderful number to slay, but fourteen days were employed in this work, and it could, therefore, be easily done. God approved of what Solomon did, and showed that his prayer, as well as his offerings, were acceptable; for, in the seventh chapter of the Second Book of Chronicles, we read, that "fire came down from heaven, and consumed the sacrifices."

The king then offered burnt-offerings in other parts of the temple, and then he and all Israel feasted on those parts of the peace-offerings which were allowed by the law for their use.





After having thus spent "seven days and seven days, even fourteen days," as we read in the fifty-sixth verse—that is, seven days in dedicating the temple, and seven in feasting at the feast of tabernacles which followed,—the people blessed the king, thanked God for all they had enjoyed, and returned home with cheerful hearts. So they lost nothing by serving God, nor shall we, if we really serve him with sincere hearts.

THE NINTH CHAPTER OF I. KINGS.

Solomon's New Cities and Merchant Ships.

"And Solomon built Gezer and Beth-horon the nether, and Baalath and Tadmor in the wilderness, in the land. And all the cities of store which Solomon had, and cities for his chariots, and cities for horsemen, and that which Solomon desired to build in Jerusalem and in Lebanon, and in all the land of his dominion."—Ver. 17, &c.

After the building of the temple, Solomon had another dream, in which God told him that he would establish his throne for himself and his children, if he faithfully continued to serve him; but, if he and his people turned to idolatry, and so departed from his commandments, then Israel should no longer enjoy the land he had given them; and their beautiful temple should be destroyed in such a manner that all who saw its ruins should wonder, and ask, "Why hath the Lord done thus unto this land and this house?"

Solomon having had a great deal of gold as well as timber from Hiram, king of Tyre, to build his houses, gave him, in payment for these, the taxes laid on twenty cities; some think, indeed, that he gave him the cities entirely, they being not cities of Israel, which he durst not give, but cities which had been conquered on the borders of Israel. Hiram seems not to have been satisfied





with his present, and so Solomon taxed all Israel to pay his debts to Hiram, amounting to six score talents of gold, or about two million seven hundred thousand dollars, and to enable himself to build a number of fine cities: among these was "Tadmor, in the wilderness," known now by the name of Palmyra, the ruins of which, in part, remain, and still give an idea of Solomon's grandeur,—for a more splendid city the world never saw. As the labour of building was hard work, Solomon employed the people of the race of the old Canaanites, that yet remained in the land; and "all the people that were left of the Amorites, Hittites, Perizites, Hivites, and Jebusites," whom the children of Israel were not able utterly to destroy, were forced into bond-service. As they had no money to pay Solomon, he obliged them to give him their labour in building, as the Israelites were aforetime obliged to make bricks and build for the Egyptians.

Solomon, continuing to worship God, went three times a year to the temple, and offered sacrifices at the Passover, Pentecost, and the Feast of Tabernacles, never neglecting these grand occasions: but these were not all, for, as one diligently serving God, many other times of worship required his services.

Solomon had also the first navy that we read of, and in building and managing his ships he was obliged to have the aid of the Tyrians, as well as in building the temple. And these ships, which were merchant-ships, were sent down the Red Sea, under the charge of Hiram's sailors, to fetch gold from a distant place, perhaps in India, then called Ophir; and Solomon's fleet brought him back "four hundred and twenty talents," which are reckoned equal to nine million four hundred and fifty thousand dollars.

See how God has given different men different abilities.—Solomon's people were chiefly husbandmen, and could only work on the land in ploughing, sowing, reaping and gathering its fruits: Hiram's were clever in the arts, and could build well and steer ships. On this account men ought to be kind towards each other, even the highest to the lowest, for no one can well do without the help of others. And, indeed, all the people of the world, did they know their own interest, would be friendly towards each other, for, even were war not a cruel practice, there is





enough to induce them to be thus kind, as, by the exchange of articles, they greatly promote each other's comforts, and add to each other's wealth.

THE TENTH CHAPTER OF I. KINGS.

The Queen of Sheba's Visit to Solomon—Solomon's great Riches.

"And when the queen of Sheba heard of the fame of Solomon, concerning the name of the Lord, she came to prove him with hard questions."

"So king Solomon exceeded all the kings of the earth for riches and for wisdom."—Vers. 1 & 23.

It is not quite certain where Sheba was. Some think it was in Africa, others in Asia, in a country called Arabia Felix, or Arabia the Happy, and others in Sumatra, in the East Indies. However, there was a queen lived in a country of that name, who, having heard the fame of Solomon's wisdom, was resolved to travel into his dominions to see him; and according to a very common custom of the East, she prepared a number of difficult questions and riddles to put to Solomon, that she might find out whether he was so wise as report stated him to be.

Agreeably to her rank, she set off on her journey, accompanied by a number of attendants; and she carried with her, as is still usual in the East, a number of articles to give as presents, especially to king Solomon: "And she came to Jerusalem with a very great train, with camels that bare spices, and very much gold and precious stones."

"And when she was come to Solomon, she communed with him of all that was in her heart,"—that is, she talked with him about every thing which she had borne in her memory for the occasion, and about which she wished to ask him.

"And Solomon told her all her questions; there was not any thing hid from the king which he told her not." He found out all her riddles, and if she asked him about things wonderful in





nature, or difficult in religion, he answered all her questions with equal ease, for God had made him wise in all these things.

"And when the Queen of Sheba had seen all Solomon's wisdom," which she perceived by his answers; "and the house that he had built"—the buildings and furniture of his palace; "and the meat of his table"—so large a quantity; "and the sitting of his servants," all placed in their proper rank and order; "and the attendance of his ministers," or those that waited at table, who each filled his proper place, and all without any confusion; "and their apparel," dressed in rich and splendid liveries; "and his cup-bearers," who served him and his nobles with wine and other liquors, when they had occasion to drink; "and his ascent by which he went up unto the house of the Lord"—the very curious steps which he had made to go up from the palace to the temple; "there was no more spirit in her." She was so astonished that, for a time, she was unable to speak. At last she said to the king, "It was a true report that I heard in mine own land, of thy acts and of thy wisdom. Howbeit I believed not the words, until I came, and mine eyes had seen it: and, behold, the half was not told me: thy wisdom and prosperity exceedeth the fame which I heard. Happy are thy men, happy are these thy servants which stand continually before thee, and that hear thy wisdom. Blessed be the Lord thy God which delighteth in thee, to set thee on the throne of Israel: because the Lord loved Israel for ever, therefore made he thee king, to do judgment and justice."

The queen, now, according to the custom of the East, offered this great man her presents: and she, as well as Solomon, must have been very rich, for she gave him as much gold as we read, in the last chapter, of his paying to Hiram, "a hundred and twenty talents," or two million seven hundred thousand dollars. This sum of itself was a noble present, but this was not all that she gave to Solomon; she also added "of spices a very great store, and precious stones"—diamonds, and other such rare articles dug out of the earth. So Solomon had now riches in abundance, for Hiram's ships brought him gold and precious stones, and a valuable wood called the almug tree, with which he "made pillars for the house of the Lord, and for the king's house,





harps also, and psalteries for singers." Josephus, the Jewish historian, says that there were as many as four hundred thousand musical instruments.

After the queen of Sheba had been so liberal, Solomon might very well afford to be liberal to her ; and so we read, " King Solomon gave unto the queen of Sheba all her desire, whatsoever she asked, beside that which Solomon gave her of his royal bounty." It is not proper with us for people to ask us to give them any thing of value which they may fancy—to do so would be very rude ; but in the East, especially among the rich, it is common ; and, therefore, the queen might, with propriety, ask Solomon to give her many curious pieces of workmanship which she saw, and which would be highly valued by her, as his gift, and as made by his clever workmen under his direction. It seems, too, that the queen was not covetous nor unreasonable in her requests, for Solomon denied her nothing that she asked, and then he added other things " of his royal bounty," or without asking. No doubt Solomon was liberal to her in return for her liberality to him, and sent her back well pleased with her visit.

This chapter closes by telling us more about Solomon's great wealth, and it is enough to make us wonder. The princes of the East are some of them very rich now, but their riches are nothing compared to those of Solomon. " The weight of gold that came to Solomon in one year, was six hundred three score and six talents of gold ;" this amounted to nearly fifteen millions of dollars. Besides this money, he had also " of the merchant-men, and of the traffic of the spice-merchants"—or what, in our country, we call customs, or duties, paid on different articles of trade brought from abroad, before persons can trade in them. " All the kings of Arabia" also paid him tribute, or sent him presents every year, that they might keep the favour of so wise and great a prince—and " the governors of the country," conquered by his father, sent the tribute also which they received.

With all this wealth, Solomon made two hundred targets of " beaten gold," or gold beaten out with the hammer. These targets were a very large sort of shield, which screened the whole





body, and the value of the gold put in each of the two hundred, was twenty-two hundred and fifty dollars.

“And he made three hundred shields of beaten gold;” three pounds of gold went to one shield, and these three pounds in weight made these three hundred shields worth eleven hundred and twenty-five dollars each. These targets and shields were put into the armoury, in the house of the forest of Lebanon. As Solomon was a peaceable king, he did not make these warlike articles to help his soldiers in battle, but only for them to carry before him when he went out in state as a great king, as our magistrates have swords and maces carried before them now.

He made also a great throne of ivory, or elephant's teeth, which was very rich, and overlaid it with gold,—either put on in plates in various parts, or curiously inlaid, like some cabinet work. The arms of this throne, or seat, also rested on some figures of lions made in gold. “And all king Solomon's drinking vessels were of gold; and all the vessels of the house of the forest of Lebanon, were of pure gold, none were of silver: it was nothing accounted of in the days of Solomon.”

Thus was Solomon the richest prince in the world, for much people came from all parts of the earth to visit him, and as rich men in the East always expect presents from their visitors, Solomon knew no end to his income, for “they brought every man his present, vessels of silver, and vessels of gold, and garments, and armour, and spices, horses and mules, a rate year by year.”

Solomon had also a thousand and four hundred chariots, and twelve thousand horsemen, some of whom “he bestowed,” or placed in the cities, where he kept his chariots, and the rest were his guards at Jerusalem,—so, if any king had made war against him, he had wisely prepared a sufficient defence for his kingdom; but he was too wise to make war himself, for he knew it was a wicked thing, and would do no good to his subjects, and so he, like a good king, kept at peace with his neighbours and the world, and made peace and happiness at home.

You see that king Solomon did not hoard up his money like a rich miser, for then it would have done nobody any good, but he laid it out in works of art, and so he made his people clever, in-





dustrious, and rich ; for while he had plenty of gold, his people had plenty of silver, which the king made to be in Jerusalem as stones, or as common as the stones in the street. And cedars, which were a valuable wood, he imported,—or got from abroad by ships,—in such quantities that they were as common as the sycamore trees, with which Judea abounded, as much as our country does with gooseberries and currants.

We are told that Solomon bought many of his chariots and horses in Egypt ; the price which he gave for his horses was an hundred and fifty shekels of silver each, or about fifty dollars, and in like manner he bought them of the kings of the Hittites, and of the kings of Syria.

My dear young reader, I do not like to end this story of Solomon's riches without reminding you that Jesus Christ has told us that while the Queen of Sheba came from afar to hear the wisdom of Solomon, he is a greater person than Solomon, and far more wise and rich than he. He is so wise that no one ever failed that sincerely looked to him in prayer, to show him the way to heaven ; and so rich that he can enrich our lives with peace and happiness here, and an inheritance of bliss in the world to come, which are better than all the gold and silver, and other treasures, which Solomon ever possessed.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER OF I. KINGS.

Solomon's Disobedience to God.

“And Solomon did evil in the sight of the Lord, and went not fully after the Lord, as did David his father.”—Ver. 6.

Solomon, who knew better, was guilty of the greatest wickedness. He, who had been so good, turned out at last very bad. This teaches you and me, always to pray earnestly to God Almighty to keep us from sinning against him ; for, I fear that Solomon, who offered up so beautiful a prayer in the temple,





when it was dedicated, neglected now to watch and pray, or God would surely have kept him from evil.

We have read that Solomon was now grown very rich, and his money enabled him to do any thing. So he had a large number of wives, amounting in the whole to a thousand. These were so many that he could scarcely speak to half of them for a long time together, but, as it was the custom of Eastern princes to have many wives, he thought he would be as grand, if not more grand, than the rest, and have this prodigious number. Now this was wrong; but what was very bad indeed, was, that these were "strange women," or, what we call foreigners, and they did not become worshippers of the true God, as Pharaoh's daughter is thought to have been, who was Solomon's chief wife—but were wicked idolaters, "women of the Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Zidonians, and Hittites; of the nations concerning which the Lord said unto the children of Israel, Ye shall not go in to them, neither shall they come in unto you: for surely they will turn away your heart after their gods."

Solomon forgot, or did not care, for what the Lord had said, and so, indeed, it came to pass, that, as he had chosen these heathen women, they did turn away his heart after other gods. "For Solomon went after Ashtaroath," or Venus, "the goddess of the Zidonians, and after Milcom," or Moloch, "the abomination of the Ammonites." And he built places where these false gods were owned and worshipped, and so he set a bad example to his subjects, did harm to his own soul, and insulted his God, who had been so good a God to him.

And here we read, that "the Lord was angry with Solomon." I have told you, more than once, I believe, that God is not angry like us, but, when he sees sin, he marks it, and,—if not repented of most sincerely, and pardon asked through Jesus Christ,—he will not fail to punish it, and this is what is meant by his being angry, because he does what we should if we were angry with a person who grievously offended us. So God told Solomon that, as he had not kept his statutes or commands, he would rend the kingdom from his family; and his son and heir to his kingdom, whose mother was a wicked Ammonitess, should not reign in peace, but





one, who was then his servant, should take away the greater part of his dominions, and rule over them. Jerusalem should, however, be spared for David's sake, and for the sake of the temple there.

Yet, though Solomon did not then lose his kingdom, he lost his peace. His sin, like all sin, was as a thorn in his side, and brought evil upon him.

There were two powerful princes who hated Solomon, but God had hitherto prevented them from hurting or troubling him; now, however, he prevented them no longer, and this is what is meant, when it is here said, "The Lord stirred up an adversary unto Solomon, Hadad, the Edomite; and God stirred up another adversary, Rezon, the son of Eliadah."

The story of Hadad is remarkable, and so we must not pass it over. He owed Solomon a grudge; and this was the reason:—in the eighth chapter of the Second Book of Samuel, we are told that David had conquered Edom, and Joab, his general, put all the males to the sword; a terrible execution he made, taking revenge on Edom for their old enmity to Israel, yet, perhaps, with too great a severity. From this general slaughter, while Joab was burying the slain,—for he left not any alive of their own people to bury them; and buried they must be, or they would be an annoyance to the country,—Hadad, a branch of the royal family, and then a little child, was taken and preserved by some of the king's servants, and brought to Egypt. They halted by the way, in Midian first, and then in Paran, where they furnished themselves with men,—not to fight for them, or force their passage, but to attend them, that their young master might come into Egypt with an equipage agreeable to his quality. There he was kindly sheltered and entertained by Pharaoh, as a distressed prince; he was well provided for, and so recommended himself, that, in process of time, he married the queen's sister, and had a child, which the queen herself took such a liking to, that she brought him up in Pharaoh's house, among the king's children. He returned to his own country again, upon the death of David and Joab, in which it should seem he settled, and remained quiet while Solomon remained wise and watchful for the public good; but from which he had an opportunity of making inroads on





Israel, when Solomon, having sinned away his wisdom, as Samson did his strength, and in the same way, grew careless of public affairs, was off his guard himself, and had forfeited the Divine protection.

Rezon, the other adversary of Solomon, was a Syrian. When David conquered the Syrians, he headed the remains of the conquered people, and lived at large by spoil and rapine. At length, when Solomon grew careless, he got possession of Damascus, and reigned there and over the country round about; and he created troubles to Israel, probably in conjunction with Hadad, all the days of Solomon—that is, after he had sinned so greatly against God. I have given these stories chiefly in the words of Mr. Henry, as I think they are related by him in a way that you can easily understand; you will find them in the words of Scripture beginning at the fourteenth verse of the chapter.

You recollect that Solomon was told that, for his sins against God, his son should lose the kingdom, and it should be given to one of Solomon's servants. That servant was named Jeroboam, the son of Nebat. He had the good quality of being very industrious and minding his business; and Solomon, like a wise man, employed him rather than an idle person, and made him a ruler of the charge, or taxes, of the house of Joseph, so that he collected the king's taxes from the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh,—for these were what was called the house of Joseph. "And as he was going to take possession of his government, he was told by the prophet Ahijah, in God's name, that he should be king." Prophets spoke by remarkable signs: "And Ahijah caught the new garment that was on him and rent it in twelve pieces. And he said to Jeroboam, Take thee ten pieces: for thus saith the Lord, the God of Israel, Behold, I will rend the kingdom out of the hand of Solomon, and will give ten tribes to thee." Then he repeated what God had before said to Solomon; and he added that if Jeroboam would walk in God's ways, God would never forsake him and his family, for it was for sin that David's family was forsaken, yet he would in time restore it, and not punish it for ever.

News of Jeroboam's being thus elected king of the ten tribes came to Solomon's ears, and he was very angry. "Solomon



sought, therefore, to kill Jeroboam ;” as if he could prevent what God had purposed ; this was a sign that Solomon had lost his wisdom owing to his sin, or he would not have thought and done so foolishly. “And Jeroboam arose and fled into Egypt, unto Shishak king of Egypt, and was in Egypt until the death of Solomon.

Solomon now died, after a reign of forty years, and his son Rehoboam reigned in his stead.

There were other things which Solomon did, and which were written in a book kept in his time, and called “the Book of the Acts of Solomon ;” that is, the book of what Solomon did ; but that book was not a divine book, and so it has long since been lost.

Many persons think that Solomon repented of his sins before he died, and that God pardoned him as a sincere penitent ; and they suppose this from what he has written in the book of Ecclesiastes. I hope it was so, but the Bible is silent about it, and for this reason—to teach us to take care how we sin against God. Sin is a dreadful thing ; we are not quite sure but that it ruined Solomon, and we must take great care, and pray often and earnestly to God that he would keep us from practising it, and that it may not ruin us.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER OF I. KINGS.

Jeroboam chosen King of the Ten Tribes, and Rehoboam King of Judah.

“And it came to pass, when all Israel heard that Jeroboam was come again, that they sent and called him unto the congregation, and made him king over all Israel : there was none that followed the house of David, but the tribe of Judah only.”—Ver. 20.

As soon as Solomon was dead, “all Israel” assembled at Shechem, a city in the tribe of Ephraim, of which Jeroboam was ;





under pretence of owning Rehoboam as their king, but they designed only to seek occasion to quarrel with him.

So they sent for Jeroboam out of Egypt, where he had fled out of the way of Solomon, and they made him their head to begin a rebellion.

And they began to complain that Solomon had used them ill, and laid heavy taxes upon them—though they never had a more peaceable and prosperous king; and they promised Rehoboam, that, if he would use them better, he should be their king.

This complaint was probably made to try Rehoboam's disposition; for he did not expect to be treated in this way, but to be acknowledged directly as his father's successor.

Rehoboam asked for three days to consider what he should do; but, surely, if he wished to make his people easy and happy, he needed not to have wanted time to answer their conditions; it is, therefore, to be feared that there was good reason to suppose that Rehoboam was inclined to be a tyrant, and so the people had a plausible excuse for not obeying him but upon the assurance that he would treat them well.

Rehoboam now called together the old and wise men who assisted Solomon in managing his kingdom, and asked their advice what he should do. And they told him that, if he would agree to be the servant of the people, and seek their welfare, as a faithful steward appointed to rule their affairs, and if he would speak kindly, and not crossly, to them, as he seemed disposed to do, then they would be sure to attach themselves to him most loyally as long as he lived.

This was good advice, but he did not like it, and was too proud to submit to it; and so he called his young men together, that were his friends, and as they were all proud like himself, and were glad of an opportunity of pleasing him, by agreeing to what they saw to be his wishes—they advised him to act in direct opposition to the opinion of the old men.

So Rehoboam spoke roughly to the people, as the young men advised him, and he said, "My father made your yoke heavy, but I will add to your yoke: my father also chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions." This was not speaking





with respect of his father, as he ought to have done; and if, in raising any of his buildings, or keeping his horses and chariots, and numerous attendants and wives, Solomon had made his people pay heavy taxes, it was neither like a good man nor a wise one, to follow the worst part of his father's example. If his father had done what was wrong, Rehoboam ought not to have done so; and if he would have gained the people's love, it was not the way to gain it when he talked of treating them worse than his father did. It may be proper to observe here, that you must not understand that Solomon really made his people to work like oxen or slaves, with wooden yokes about their necks; or that he really made them to be flogged with whips; or that Rehoboam intended to punish them by flogging them with a still heavier whip, which was called by the name of a scorpion;—all this was only speaking in what is called figures, and meaning only to express that, if Solomon gave the people any reason to complain against him, he, Rehoboam, would give them more reason; just as they would feel a heavy yoke, if on their necks, more painful than a light one, or a flogging with a scorpion—a heavy whip with irons at the end like spurs for horses—more painful than one with a light whip.

Here Rehoboam acted of his own accord, and showed his own folly in being so headstrong, but “the cause was from the Lord, that he might perform his saying, which the Lord spake by Ahijah.” God left him to have his own way, and he paid dearly for his obstinacy. When young persons will not hearken to the good advice of old and wise people, they very often suffer for it as this rash prince did.

If the people were not fond of Rehoboam before, this was enough to make them dislike him still more, and so they cried out, “What portion have we in David?”—that is, the house of David does not belong to us—our tribes have no need to care for a king of that family; “neither have we inheritance in the son of Jesse,” another name by which they meant David;—“now see to thine own house, David,” or, thou son or grandson of David—take care of thyself, and of thine own tribe. “So Israel departed unto their tents;”—they went home to their dwellings, and would not choose Rehoboam to be their king.





So Rehoboam had only Judah to reign over, and part of the tribe of Benjamin, and such of the children of Israel as dwelt in the cities of Judah, and did not like to go and live in other parts of the land. From this time, then, we shall read of TWO KINGS where one only used to reign—the kings of Judah and Israel; the tribes of Israel, with their lands, being divided between them.

Rehoboam was much mortified to lose so large a portion of the people, and, to show his authority, he sent to demand taxes of them; but this was another piece of folly, for if they would not own him for king, it was not likely that they would pay him any tribute. Some, however, think that Adoram, the person he sent, went only as a peace-maker, to try and gain the people over for Rehoboam; but, as he was a person employed in gathering taxes, he could not have selected a worse to accomplish his object. However, Rehoboam failed, for the angry people would not pay him taxes and acknowledge him as king, and, in their fury, they fell upon the unfortunate Adoram, and pelted him with stones till he died. Rehoboam, on learning this, gave up all hopes of success, unless by force, and, lest he should be killed as Adoram was, he “made speed to get him up in his chariot to flee to Jerusalem.”

And all the people of Israel who lived in distant parts of the country, being told that Jeroboam was returned from Egypt, assembled and appointed him king over all Israel; “there was none that followed the house of David,” except—as mentioned before—some of the tribe of Benjamin, and a few straggling persons of other tribes, “but the tribe of Judah-only.”

When Rehoboam reached Jerusalem, which was 40 miles from Shechem, he assembled all the men fit for war, and was about to march with an army of an hundred and eighty thousand chosen men, to fight against Israel. Had he marched directly with these, Jeroboam must have been beaten, for he had no such forces ready; but God had designed that this proud young man should be humbled, and that his word by his prophet should not fail; and so Shemaiah, a “man of God,” or prophet, was now sent to forbid Rehoboam’s fighting, and to warn the people not to go against Israel; and, therefore, they did not go.

Jeroboam now began to build and repair some of his cities





and, fearing that if his people should go up to Jerusalem to worship—as the tribes had hitherto done at the command of God—they might forsake his authority, he thought of a scheme to keep them quite separate from Judah. Assisted by some wicked counsellors, he made two calves of gold, and said to the people, “It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem,” which was a great way off: “behold thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt. And he set the one in Bethel, and the other in Dan.” And he made a house of high places, or a temple, at Dan, and also he made idolatrous priests, and ordained a religious service, and offered upon an altar that he built, and burnt incense. In all this he did wickedly, and displeased God, who punished him for his great sin, as we shall learn in reading the next chapter.

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER OF I. KINGS.

Jeroboam's Hand withered—The disobedient Prophet.

“And when he was gone, a lion met him by the way, and slew him: and his carcase was cast in the way, and the ass stood by it, the lion also stood by the carcase.”—Ver. 24.

While Jeroboam was standing at his idolatrous altar, and offering incense displeasing to God, God sent a prophet out of Judah to reprove him for his sin, and to foretell the destruction of his wicked race of priests, and the ruin of his altars. “And he cried against the altar in the word of the Lord, and said, O altar, altar, thus saith the Lord, Behold, a child shall be borne unto the house of David, Josiah by name, and upon thee shall he offer the priests of the high places that burn incense upon thee, and men's bones shall be burnt upon thee.” The altar could not hear what he said, but this was the way in which he was to reprove the king and his priests and people, and pronounce the end of this wickedness. You will, by and by, read about Josiah, a prince of that house of David which Jeroboam now despised, and how he did what the prophet here said he should do; and yet this did not happen till





three hundred and sixty-six years after the prophet had prophesied. But God told the prophet, and he knows everything that will take place in all the world; we see by the world he has made that he is very powerful and very wise, and we cannot but believe what his word tells us, that "all things are possible with God."

That the king might not have any reason to doubt the prophet's word, he showed him a sign that God had sent him. "Behold," said he, "the altar shall be rent, and the ashes shall be poured out."

Jeroboam, who felt that he was reprov'd, and not the senseless altar, and being full of rage, stretched out his hand, and cried, "Lay hold on him." "And his hand, which he put forth against him, dried up, so that he could not pull it in again to him." The altar also was rent, and the ashes poured out from the altar, according to the sign which the man of God had given by the word of the Lord.

Jeroboam was frightened when his hand dried up and became shrivelled, and then he remembered that his calves could not restore his hand, and he begged the prophet to entreat the Lord his God that his hand might be cured. And the prophet forgave his bitter enemy, when he showed signs of sorrow,—as all good men should forgive,—and he prayed to God, and God restored the king's hand.

Then Jeroboam, to show his gratitude, asked the prophet to go with him and take something to eat and refresh himself, for he must have been weary after a long journey. But God had forbidden the prophet to eat with any one at Bethel, to show how much he detested the ways of the wicked, and good people should not make them their companions. So he would not go with the king.

"Now there dwelt an old prophet in Bethel," one who had probably been trained up in one of Samuel's colleges; but he seems to have departed from God, or he would not have lived among bad people, or at least without reproving them for their idolatry. When this prophet was told by his sons of all that had happened at the altar, he was very anxious to see the prophet of Judah, who, by this time, was on his way home. So he got his ass saddled, and rode after him as fast as he could. And he found him





faint and weary, sitting under an oak to screen him from the sun, and he asked him to go back with him and have something to eat. But the prophet of Judah would not go back, because God had told him not to eat at Bethel. The old prophet, however, invented a lie, and told him that an angel had commanded him from the Lord to bring him back.

No doubt he was glad to return, as he was weary and wanted some refreshment, but he too hastily believed the old prophet, and so disobeyed God. As God had told him what to do, he ought to have prayed to God that he might do what was right before he attempted to return; but he forgot this, and so you will see what happened for his disobedience.

While he and the old prophet were sitting at table, God spake by the old man, and he cried unto the man of God that came from Judah, saying, "Thus saith the Lord, Forasmuch as thou hast disobeyed the mouth of the Lord," that is, not minded what God had spoken, as is plain from what follows, "and hast not kept the commandment which the Lord thy God commanded thee, but camest back and hast eaten bread and drank water in the place of which the Lord did say unto thee, Eat no bread and drink no water, thy carcase shall not come into the sepulchre of thy fathers;" that is, thou shalt die very soon, and shalt not be buried with thy relations. This seems a very severe sentence, but it shows you and me, how much God is displeased with sin.

My dear young reader, have you never disobeyed God's commands?—think a little—yes, you have. It is of his great mercy that he has not slain you: though we have no lions in our roads here, to kill us as you will find the prophet was killed, yet he could do it in a thousand other ways. But though you have sinned, he has spared you. And why has he done this? That you may repent. That you may love him and serve him all your days. But if, after all, you do not feel sorrow for your sins against God, and humbly seek pardon through Jesus Christ, you will perish more wretchedly than this prophet, who, though his body was slain by a lion, was, we hope, yet saved at last: for though he sinned, and his sin was great as a prophet, yet he did not seem to have sinned wilfully, but through weakness, and we





may hope that though God killed his body, he spared his soul.

The old prophet now lent the man of God his ass, and he rode towards home, but a lion met him by the way and slew him.

Now, this was not a mere common accident, for if so, the lion would have devoured the man, and have killed his ass as well as himself, and have attacked the passengers who saw the lion and the carcase; but when the beast had slain the prophet he was like a tame animal, and did no other harm. "And, behold, men passed by and saw the carcase cast in the way, and the lion standing by the carcase: and they came and told it in the city where the old prophet dwelt."

The old prophet immediately went and took away the body, and mourned over it,—as well he might, for he had brought the prophet of Judah to this sad end,—and then he buried him in his own sepulchre.

As for Jeroboam he still went on in his wickedness. There are many that will hear no warnings, but they shall not escape at last. God is just as well as merciful—O that we may seek his favour, and then he will be merciful to us!

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER OF I. KINGS.

The Sins of Jeroboam and Rehoboam, and the Afflictions of Israel and Judah.

"For the Lord shall smite Israel, as a reed is shaken in the water, and he shall root up Israel out of this good land, which he gave to their fathers, and shall scatter them beyond the river, because they have made their groves, provoking the Lord to anger.

"And he shall give Israel up, because of the sins of Jeroboam, who did sin, and who made Israel to sin.

"And Judah did evil in the sight of the Lord, and they provoked him to jealousy with their sins which they had committed, above all that their fathers had done.





“For they also built them high places, and images, and groves, on every high hill, and under every green tree.”—Vers. 15, 16, and 22, 23.

Jeroboam had a son named Abijah, and now, as a punishment of Jeroboam's sin, God permitted some disease to fall upon him and threaten his life.

The king then told his wife to disguise herself, or dress in such way as that she might not be known, and to take a present with her, and go to Shiloh, to Ahijah the prophet,—who had told him that he should be king over Israel,—and the prophet would tell her whether the child would live or die. How silly men often are when they are wicked!—for if the prophet could tell what would happen to the child, surely he could tell who came to consult him; so that it was a proof of great folly to tell his wife to try and deceive him.

Ahijah was now blind from age, but God told him that Jeroboam's wife was about to visit him, and for what purpose, and what he should say to her.

As soon as he heard the sound of her feet entering in at the door, he knew who she was, and he said, “Come in, thou wife of Jeroboam; why feignest thou thyself to be another?—for I am sent to thee with heavy tidings.” And then he told her to tell Jeroboam how God was displeased with him for all his ingratitude after he had raised him to the throne of Israel; and for all the evil he had done in making other gods, and molten images; and that he would cut off all his heirs from the throne, so that none should remain,—just as men sweep away from their sight the last remains of filthy dung. “Him that dieth of Jeroboam in the city,” said the prophet, “shall the dogs eat; and him that dieth in the field shall the fowls of the air eat; for the Lord hath spoken it;” meaning to say that none of them should be decently buried. One only should be honourably buried; the child Abijah should die, and all Israel should mourn for him as the heir to the throne, and God would take him away in love to him, because he should not live to suffer the disgrace which should fall upon the family of this wicked king—“because,” said the prophet, “in





him there is found some good thing toward the Lord God of Israel in the house of Jeroboam." See here how God loves good children and notices them, and if, like Abijah, they are taken out of this world when "some good thing" is in them, they have nothing to fear, for God will take them to himself. He is pleased with them, for the good that is in them he kindly puts there; we have only to pray that he would make us good, or in other words, make us to love and serve him, and then, whether we live or die, we shall be sure to be happy.

The prophet then told how God would raise up a king to cut off the house of Jeroboam, which was soon after done by Baasha, and Israel too should suffer because Jeroboam had made them to sin. If others tempt us to sin against God, God will punish them for being the tempters, but that is no excuse for us to say they persuaded us to do the evil; in doing what is bad, we also expose ourselves to just punishment. Oh, let us then be afraid of sinning against the great God!

Well, as soon as Jeroboam's wife got home, the child died as the prophet had foretold, and all the rest of his words came to pass.

More was said about this wicked king in some chronicles, or accounts of his deeds which were kept in his life-time, but not being a part of the Word of God, they are lost, with many other things that have perished by time.

The length of Jeroboam's reign was twenty-two years, and Nadab his son reigned in his stead. He lived longer than Rehoboam, as he reigned only seventeen years.

Rehoboam was forty-one years old when he began to reign over Judah: and as he reigned seventeen years, he was only fifty-eight years of age when he died. The same evils that were committed in Israel were also done in Judah—idols were worshipped, and all the sins which made God destroy Sodom were here practised. So God permitted Shishak, king of Egypt, to conquer Jerusalem, and he took away all the treasures which David and Solomon had laid up, and all the rich and beautiful shields of gold, about which we have read, which Solomon had made, and Rehoboam was obliged to have shields of brass made instead of them, that they might be carried before him whenever he went out in state.





Thus, on account of his sins, Rehoboam died disgraced by his foes. His whole life was a scene of trouble, as was Jeroboam's, for "there was war between Rehoboam and Jeroboam all their days."

Rehoboam was buried in the city of David, and his son Abijam reigned in his stead.

THE FIFTEENTH CHAPTER OF I. KINGS.

The Reigns of Abijam and Asa, Kings of Judah, and of Nadab and Baasha, Kings of Israel.

"And Abijam slept with his fathers, and they buried him in the city of David: and Asa his son reigned in his stead."

"And Nadab, the son of Jeroboam, began to reign over Israel in the second year of Asa, king of Judah, and reigned over Israel two years. And Baasha, the son of Ahijah, of the house of Issachar, conspired against him; and Baasha smote him at Gibbethon, which belongeth to the Philistines (for Nadab, and all Israel laid siege to Gibbethon.) Even in the third year of Asa, king of Judah, did Baasha slay him, and reigned in his stead."—Vers. 8 and 25.

You remember that Rehoboam, king of Judah, and Jeroboam, who was made king over Israel, both began to reign at the same time; but Rehoboam reigned only seventeen years, while Jeroboam reigned twenty-two years—five years longer. During those five years, there were two other kings reigned over Judah, Abijam and Asa. Abijam, the son of Rehoboam, reigned three years only. He was as wicked as his father; yet, for David's sake, did the Lord his God give him a lamp in Jerusalem—which means, that God did not extinguish his family, as we put out a light, but let the lamp continue to burn,—that is, let the family still reign, for he set up his son after him to establish Jerusalem, where were his temple and altar. Abijam, like his father, continued to go to war with Jeroboam. Abijam was buried in the city of David, and Asa his son reigned in his stead.





“And in the twentieth year of Jeroboam, king of Israel, reigned Asa over Judah.” He drove the wicked out of the land, and removed the idols which his father had made. Nor did he pass by sin in his grandmother, Maachah,—for she was the mother of his father, Abijam, though he called her his mother, because she had, perhaps, brought him up as a mother. Maachah was fond of idols, and had set up one in a grove, which he broke to pieces and burnt; and he took away her royal dignity of queen, that all might see he was resolved to honour his God, and that he would not allow the great to set an evil example. And whatever spoils had been dedicated to God, with silver and gold vessels for the temple, he took care to place there.

It is pleasant, after reading about bad kings, to read of this good king; yet even he did what was not right, for he bribed Benhadad to break his promise of friendship with the king of Israel; and his bribes were taken out of the gold and silver that he had given for God's service in the temple. Benhadad, in consequence, went and fought against Israel, and rescued Judah from their encroachments.

Asa, in his latter years, was diseased in his feet, some think he had the gout; he reigned forty-one years, and left his throne to Jehoshaphat his son.

Two kings in Israel who succeeded Jeroboam are also mentioned in this chapter. “Nadab, the son of Jeroboam, began to reign over Israel, in the second year of Asa, king of Judah.” He was a wicked king, and Baasha, a man of the tribe of Issachar, supposed to have been an officer in his army, conspired against him, and slew him. He was then besieging, or trying to take, Gibbethon, a city of the tribe of Dan, which the Philistines had obtained, and while he was engaged in warring, this man contrived to kill him. This was what the prophet Ahijah had said, as mentioned in the fourteenth chapter: “Moreover, the Lord shall raise him up a king over Israel, who shall cut off the house of Jeroboam that day: but what? even now”—meaning, when will it happen? Why now, very soon. “For it came to pass when he reigned, that he smote all the house of Jeroboam; he left not to Jeroboam any that breathed, until he had destroyed him, according unto the saying





of the Lord, which he spake by his servant Ahijah, the Shilonite. Because of the sins of Jeroboam which he sinned, and which he made Israel sin, by his provocation wherewith he provoked the Lord to anger." This cruelty of Baasha was, to prevent any of Jeroboam's family from recovering the throne; but while he was guilty of these murders, God left him to be the executioner of a wicked family, who was no longer to reign over Israel. Thus ended the reign of this Nadab, in two years. God sometimes spares sinners a long while, but often we see that "the wicked is driven away in his wickedness."

Baasha was at war with Asa, king of Judah, for many years. He reigned twenty-four years over Israel, and was as wicked as the family of Jeroboam which he had destroyed.

THE SIXTEENTH CHAPTER OF I. KINGS.

The History of more Kings of Israel—Elah, the Son of Baasha, and Zimri, his Captain, who killed him, and destroyed Baasha's Family, as he had destroyed Jeroboam's; and Omri, Captain of the Host, made King by all Israel.—The beginning of the Reign of Ahab.

"And Ahab, the son of Omri, did evil in the sight of the Lord, above all that were before him."—Ver. 30.

Before Baasha died, a prophet, named Jehu, was ordered to tell him that for his following wicked ways, as Jeroboam had done, God would cut off his family, as he had cut off that of Jeroboam, and he would punish him as a murderer: for though he had executed vengeance on a wicked man, he had done it for no good purpose, but only out of ambitious views, that he might get his throne.

When Baasha died, his son Elah succeeded him; but he reigned only two years over Israel, for Zimri, one of his chief captains, killed him while he was getting drunk in the house of Arza, his steward, and so reigned in his stead.

And Zimri, fearing lest any of Baasha's family should conspire





against him, killed them also, as Jehu had foretold, and did just as Baasha had done to the family of Jeroboam. So here we see two entire wicked families destroyed for their sins. God would not have let the wicked usurpers seize the thrones, had they and their families loved and served him with all their hearts.

Zimri reigned only seven days, yet, during his short reign, he showed that he was as wicked as those whom God had before punished.

The army, being encamped before Gibbethon, and learning how Zimri had made himself king by killing his royal master, resolved that he should not long reign, and so they chose Omri, who also was a captain, and made him king that day in the camp. The army then left Gibbethon, and marched to Tirzah, where Zimri was, and besieged it, and took it. Zimri, seeing that he could not escape, ran to his palace, and set fire to it, and so perished in the flames.

Omri was not, however, at ease, though chosen by the army of Israel, for a party rose up against him,—perhaps some of the friends of Zimri,—and they set up one “Tibni, the son of Ginath,” as king; so that, for a long time, there were two kings in Israel fighting against each other, till, at last, Omri prevailed, and reigned over the whole kingdom.

The royal palace having been burnt at Tirzah, Omri built another city, which became the royal residence, and this was afterwards famous in history. “He bought the hill, Samaria, of Shemer, for two talents of silver, and built on the hill, and called the name of the city which he built, after the name of Shemer, owner of the hill, Samaria.” The price he gave for this ground was seven hundred pounds of our money, which was a small sum, but it might have been sold cheap to please the king, as he wanted the hill for such a purpose.

Shechem was the first capital city of the kings of Israel, then Tirzah, and, from this time, Samaria. The city at last became so important, that the middle part of Canaan was called after it, and the inhabitants of the country between Galilee on the north, and Judah on the south, were called Samaritans.

Omri reigned twelve years. He was a very wicked man, and





ELIJAH RAISING THE DEAD CHILD.



ELIJAH MEETING THE WIDOW OF ZAREPHATH.



"did worse than all that were before him." He was buried in Samaria, and "Ahab his son reigned in his stead."

Good Asa was yet reigning over Judah, for remember, he reigned "forty and one years," and so he saw the end of all these wicked kings of Israel, who had such short reigns.

"And in the thirty and eighth year of Asa, king of Judah, began Ahab, the son of Omri, to reign over Israel." Bad as Omri was, it is said Ahab "did evil in the sight of the Lord, above all that were before him." He married "Jezebel, the daughter of Ethbaal, king of the Zidonians," or people of Zidon; she was a bad woman, and a great idolator, and, to please her, he worshipped her ugly idol, called Baal, which she had set up in Samaria, and he made the people worship it too. Indeed, Israel had now become so wicked, that in defiance of a curse which had been pronounced by Joshua when he destroyed Jericho—threatening death against the first-born, or eldest son, of the man who should dare to rebuild it—one Hiel, of Bethel, was now actually bold enough to do so, and, as God threatened by Joshua, so it came to pass, for his eldest son died. This happened five hundred years after the threatening was pronounced, and, most likely, this wicked offender laughed at it, and perhaps his son joined in his wickedness, and so God punished them both. It is always dangerous to be careless about God's threatenings, and to laugh at any thing that is wicked.

THE SEVENTEENTH CHAPTER OF I. KINGS.

*Elijah miraculously fed—The Widow's Oil and Meal multiplied—
The Widow's Son raised to life.*

"And the woman said to Elijah, Now by this I know that thou art a man of God, and that the word of the Lord in thy mouth is truth."—Ver. 24.

God was so displeased with Ahab and Israel for their sins, that he sent a dreadful message to them by a prophet. The name of this prophet was Elijah, a Tishbite, or native of Tishbeh, a city





beyond Jordan, in the tribe of Gad, and in the land of Gilead. This was Elijah's message, "As the Lord God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word." Now, you know, if there is neither dew nor rain, nothing will grow, and so there could be no harvest, and, of course, there must follow a dreadful famine.

As Ahab was a very wicked king, he would, no doubt, have killed Elijah, in his anger, for delivering such a message; but before he could scarcely recover from his astonishment, God ordered Elijah to escape, and hide himself by the brook Cherith, near Jordan. Here God had commanded ravens to feed him, "and the ravens brought him bread and flesh in the morning, and bread and flesh in the evening; and he drank of the brook."

As there is sometimes a difficulty in knowing exactly, when creatures are named in the Bible, what particular kinds are meant, some have thought that God did not employ those hungry and unclean ravens which we have sometimes seen to feed the prophet; but we know that he could do so, and these birds could not tell any body where he was; however, we see that God wonderfully took care of the prophet, and caused him to be provided for during the whole time that he hid himself near the brook.

After a while the brook dried up, as there had been no rain to fill it, and then God told the prophet to go to Zarephath, a town that was near Zidon, and a widow woman, who lived there, should feed him. When he got to the gate of the city, he found the woman gathering sticks, and he asked her for some water and a morsel of bread. She told him she had no bread, but only a little handful of meal in a barrel, and a little oil in a cruse, or small cup; and she was getting sticks to dress this last portion of food to keep herself and her son alive. The prophet then told her to make him a cake first, and then she should make another for herself and son, for God would always provide meal in the barrel, and oil in the cruse, till the famine should be over. The woman saw that this was a prophet, and so she obeyed him, "and she, and he, and her house, did eat many days. And the barrel of meal wasted not, neither did the cruse of oil fail, according to the word of the Lord, which he spake by Elijah."





This woman did not lose by lodging the prophet ; she got her provisions during the time of famine—but she got more reward still. By and by her son fell sick, and “there was no breath left in him,” which means that he died. She then thought that God had sent the prophet to her house to punish her for her sins,—for perhaps she had bowed to Baal, the false god, with the rest of the people, and now her conscience smote her, and she felt that she had done what was wrong. In her distress she complained angrily to the prophet, and he said nothing to her but “Give me thy son.” “And he took him out of her bosom,” to which she fondly pressed him, like a tender mother, though he was dead ; and he “carried him up into a loft, where he abode, and laid him upon his own bed.” And then he prayed to God, “and he stretched himself upon the child three times,” to warm his cold body, “and the soul of the child came into him” again, and Elijah took him and gave him to his mother.

She was delighted enough to see her son restored, and declared that it was, indeed, a proof that Elijah was a man of God, and that all he said, as a prophet, would come to pass.

THE EIGHTEENTH CHAPTER OF I. KINGS.

Baal's False Prophets exposed and slain by Elijah.

“And Elijah said unto them, “Take the prophets of Baal : let not one of them escape. And they took them ; and Elijah brought them down to the brook Kishon, and slew them there.”—Ver. 40.

After Elijah had hid himself from Ahab for three years, God ordered him to go to him again. At this time “there was a sore,” or afflictive “famine in Samaria,” which was as bad for Israel as it would be for England, if all the people could get nothing to eat or drink in London.

Ahab had got a steward of his house, whose name was Obadiah. He was a very good man, though employed by a wicked king ; for bad people sometimes like to employ those that are good, as





they can trust them better than they can those that are too much like themselves. This Obadiah had feared God from his youth, from the time when he was quite young; and we cannot fear God too soon, for, as a good writer says, "those that are good betimes are likely to be very good." Among other good things which he had done, he had hid a hundred of the persecuted prophets of the Lord in a cave: and when it was difficult to get anything to eat, he had managed to feed them with bread and water. These prophets had, no doubt, borne witness against the idolatry of Ahab; and his wicked wife, Jezebel, had caused many of their fellow-prophets to be slain. It was, therefore, very bold of Obadiah to try and save the rest; for, if his kindness towards them had been known, Jezebel would, most likely, have had him severely punished, or killed, as well as the rest. Obadiah had now been sent out by his master to visit all the spots of land by the fountains and brooks, wherever it was likely that there was moisture enough to make some grass grow, and he himself went another way for the same purpose, so that something might be got for his horses and mules to eat.

In this journey Elijah met Obadiah, who knew him, and Elijah told Obadiah to let his master, Ahab, know he wanted to see him. Obadiah was, however, afraid that Elijah would be gone from the spot before he could find Ahab; and, as the king had sent every where to seek the prophet, and even made people swear that he was not in their country, should Elijah now cheat him, Ahab would be so enraged that Obadiah had not secured him, that he would kill him for being so disappointed. Elijah, however, faithfully promised to meet the king, and so Obadiah found Ahab, and Ahab went to meet Elijah.

And Ahab said to Elijah, "Art thou he that troubleth Israel?" Now, it was not Elijah that troubled Israel, but God troubled Israel for their wickedness. But if Ahab meant to say—which, perhaps, he also did—that Elijah was the cause of Israel's being troubled, he only showed how apt wicked people are to try and put off the effects of their sin upon others, and to ascribe them to any but the real cause. Ahab was himself the cause of the famine, because he made Israel to sin, and this the prophet told him.





Then Elijah told the king to call a general assembly of all the false prophets of Baal, and of the groves, in number eight hundred and fifty, who were supported by the wicked Jezebel. The king, having his heart inclined to obey the prophet's order, called the false prophets together at mount Carmel, four hundred and fifty of whom attended.

Now, as we cannot serve sin and serve God too, Elijah spoke to all the people, and asked them how long they would try to serve both God and Baal, and pretend to love God, while at the command of Jezebel, they worshipped idols. And the people were ashamed to answer him, knowing how wickedly they had done. Elijah then told the prophets of Baal to get two bullocks; and to choose one for themselves, and to dress it—that is, slay it, and cut it in pieces, and lay it upon a pile of wood, but without any fire; and to call upon their gods to send fire to consume it, and he would do the same; and then, the God that consumed it, should be the people's god; and the people agreed to this.

And the priests got everything ready, and they cried, "O Baal, hear us!" And they leaped upon the altar, and Elijah mocked them, and told them to cry louder, for their god was perhaps talking, or running, or travelling, or sleeping. This was to show that their gods were not like the God of Israel, who can always see and hear, and is always present in every place, and knows all that we say or do, and can always listen to us when we pray. Well, Elijah gave them all day to try what they could do, for he knew they served a false god, and could do nothing by praying to him; but this would prove to Ahab and Israel, more than any thing, how foolish and wicked it was to serve Baal. And the priests were almost driven mad with vexation, and they even "cut themselves after their manner, with knives and lancets, till the blood gushed out upon them;" but all in vain.

Elijah now called all the people around him. And he repaired God's altar, and he made a trench round it to hold water, and he put wood on the altar, and he cut the bullock in pieces, and laid him on the wood; and he ordered four barrels of water to be poured on the sacrifice and on the wood, and this he repeated three times, till the water ran round the altar, and the trench was





filled. Then Elijah prayed to God, and God sent fire from heaven, and it burnt the sacrifice, and it dried up every thing about it, even the water in the trench, as if it had been licked clean. It would have been wonderful if the fire had descended and consumed the wood even in a dry state, but it was more wonderful to see it doing so when every thing was drenched with wet: "and when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces: and they said, The Lord, he is the God; the Lord, he is the God!"

Then Elijah, as God's prophet, ordered the people to take and slay all the prophets of Baal, as a punishment for their wickedness in misleading them, for they knew very well that Baal was no god; and also to prevent these wicked men from drawing them away from the true God any more. So they slew the false prophets at the brook Kishon, not because it was Elijah's order merely, but because Elijah was acting as God's servant, in executing this sentence; for in the thirteenth chapter of Deuteronomy, it was commanded that, if any false prophet led the people's hearts from the true God, he should surely be put to death, that they might put the evil away from the midst of them. In taking them to the brook Kishon to slay them, they would feel how richly they merited their punishment, when they beheld its channel dried up, as were all the waters of the land, as a part of the punishment which, owing to their idolatry, they had brought upon a whole nation, whom they had deluded.

My dear young reader, I can never remind you too often how angry God is with sinners; and I can never charge you enough to stand in awe of him, and sin not. God does not always cut off sinners now by the hand of the judge, but he will certainly destroy them all in the last great day, unless they have now repented, and sought his mercy through Jesus Christ. Let you and me, on our bended knees, beseech him to pardon all our sins; for, though we may not have done exactly what the prophets of Baal did, yet we have not loved God as we ought, I am sure of that; and we have sometimes loved other objects better than God, and that is idolatry; and so, without his mercy and grace, we must be undone for ever.

After these false prophets were removed, and the people owned





that the Lord was their God, God sent rain to cause the fruits of the earth to grow. Elijah saw that the rain was coming, and as Ahab had had nothing to eat and drink during the day, having been at the sacrifice, Elijah told him to refresh himself. The prophet then went to the top of mount Carmel, and threw himself upon the earth, and he put his face between his knees, which was a posture in which he prayed, and humbly thanked God for honouring him before all Israel. Then he sent his servant to look towards the sea, and observe if any cloud appeared. And when there was none, he sent him again and again seven times, till, at last, he saw one which was about as big to his eye as the size of a man's hand. Then Elijah knew that the torrents of rain would speedily fall, and he urged Ahab to get into his chariot, and make all speed to get home, or he would be drenched with wet; for the chariots of those days were not close like ours, but open as our gigs, though shaped more like shells or boats. Elijah also paid all due respect to the king; and having "girded up his loins," or tucked up his long garments round his waist, he ran along before him, as one of his attendants, for sixteen miles, which was the distance between Carmel and Jezreel, the place where Jezebel was, and where her idolatry was practised in a high degree. Ahab might have asked the prophet to ride, instead of allowing him to be his servant; but if he did not know how to respect the prophet, the prophet would not fail to show respect to him as his king. We must give honour to whom honour is due; for if bad men are raised in rank in the world, while we hate their wickedness, we must remember that it is God that raiseth up one, and putteth down another. Elijah's conduct explained what is meant by "Fear God; honour the king."





THE NINETEENTH CHAPTER OF I. KINGS.

Elijah's Flight from Jezebel.

"He arose and went for his life, and came to Beer-sheba, which belongeth to Judah, and left his servant there.

"But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness."

Vers. 3, 4.

When Ahab got home, he told Jezebel of all that Elijah had done, and when she heard that he had slain the false prophets, whom she protected, she swore by her gods that she would kill Elijah, and sent a messenger to tell him so.

As in her passion she had let Elijah know what she intended to do, he made his escape from her, and perhaps she was glad to get him out of the country. He did not stop in his flight till he had got quite out of the kingdom of Israel, and had reached Beer-sheba, in the kingdom of Judah, over which Jehoshaphat reigned: this place was eighty-four miles from Jezreel. Here, however, he feared that Jezebel, in her rage, might pursue him, as her husband, Ahab, and Jehoshaphat, were on good terms, and so Jehoshaphat might not have quarrelled about pursuing a man into his territories. Elijah, therefore, travelled yet twenty miles further, and reached the wilderness of Arabia or Paran, in which the children of Israel travelled for forty years. Here he sat himself down to rest under a juniper-tree, and he begged of God to let him die, for he was not stronger than his fathers to endure so much fatigue and anxiety. But God had provided an angel to feed him, and he awoke him from a refreshing rest, and said, "Arise and eat. And he looked, and behold there was a cake baken on the coals," or hot stones, after the custom of the East, "and a cruise of water at his head. And he did eat and drink, and laid himself down again." After he had slept again, the angel once more awoke him, and told him to take some more food; "and he arose, and did eat and drink, and went in the strength of that meat forty days and forty nights, unto Horeb, the mount of God." God





made this food more nourishing than common food, and so it kept him alive and well for so long a time.

Horeb was the part of Sinai where the Lord appeared to Moses in the burning bush; and here Elijah hid himself in a cave.

While he was in this place, God called to him in some way, so that he knew it was no human creature that spoke, and he said, "What dost thou here, Elijah?"—for Elijah did what was wrong in running away from Jezreel. He ought to have continued to reprove Jezebel, and the rest of the idolators. He forgot that God had protected him against all the priests of Baal, who could easily have killed him with their knives and lancets with which they cut themselves; and he could as easily have protected him against the fury of Jezebel. Elijah answered the voice, and gave a sad account of Israel, that they had forsaken God's covenant and worshipped other gods; that they had thrown down God's altars, and so tried to make his true worship unknown in the land; that they had slain God's prophets, that there might be none to reprove their sinfulness; and that he was the only prophet remaining, whom they would kill also, if they could find him.

The voice then ordered Elijah to go upon the mount, where Moses had stood before him. And there was a great wind that split parts of the mountain, and an earthquake, and a fire, by lightning, and in other ways, as have been seen in earthquakes; but the Lord did not speak in the wind, as he did, which we shall hereafter read, to his servant Job; nor did he speak in the earthquake and the fire, as he did to Moses; but Elijah heard "a still small voice." Then Elijah knew by its sound that it was nothing human, and he felt his soul and all around him to be very solemn. Under a sense of his own insignificance before God, he wrapped his mantle around his face as a sign of humility, for we hide our faces when we are ashamed—and he went and stood at the entrance of the cave. There God's voice spoke to him again, and told him to go to the wilderness of Damascus, and to anoint Hazael king over Syria, and Jehu king over Israel, and Elisha to be a prophet; and that each of these should be employed in destroying the wicked and idolatrous people in Israel. The voice told him, however, that he was mistaken in supposing that





he only was left to oppose Israel's idol, for there were seven thousand who had not bowed the knee to Baal, nor kissed their hands to his honour, as though they had kissed the idol.

Elijah having left his hiding-place, met Elisha, who was busy in ploughing with twelve oxen, and he cast his mantle, or rather the skirts of it, over Elisha, which Elisha understood to mean that he was to go under his protection, and to have the same spirit of prophecy as himself. And Elisha begged leave to go home and kiss his father and mother, whom, as a good son, he loved and respected, and when he had told them where he was going, he would follow Elijah. So he slew a yoke of oxen, and dressed them with the wood of the plough, and invited his friends to his farewell feast, and then he followed Elijah, and became his constant attendant as long as he lived.

THE TWENTIETH CHAPTER OF I. KINGS.

The War between Benhadad, King of Syria, and Ahab, King of Israel.

“And Benhadad, the king of Syria, gathered all his host together, and there were thirty and two kings with him; and horses and chariots: and he went up and besieged Samaria, and warred against it.”—Ver 1.

We now leave Elijah for a while, and have here the account of the war of Benhadad, king of Syria, against Ahab, king of Israel. Benhadad, under some pretence or other, marched with a large army against Ahab, and he had thirty-two kings, or princes, along with him, who had each brought troops to help him from their little governments.

Then Benhadad sent a very impudent message to Ahab, and told him that every thing he had must be considered as his. Ahab, fearing his large army, was willing to own himself tributary to him; that is, liable to pay him what he might please to demand. However, Benhadad became yet more insolent, and he sent his messengers again, and gave him to understand that he did not mean that he should be tributary, but he must really give up all





ELIJAH CASTING HIS MANTLE ON ELISHA.



THE PEOPLE DESTROYING THE HOUSE OF BAA.



he possessed, not only his silver and gold, but his wives and children to be slaves, and they must all be directly carried away.

Ahab then called his counsellors together, who advised him not to give up the country to ruin : and so he sent word to Benhadad, that he would do what he had before promised, but he could not submit to such severe terms. When Benhadad heard Ahab's message, he was in a great rage, and he swore by his gods, like a wicked heathen, that he would march into Samaria, with so many men, that the very dust of the city, when he had beaten it to pieces, should not make so many handfuls as he would have soldiers to destroy it. The king of Israel made a wise answer to this speech, and said, "Let not him that girdeth on his harness boast himself as he that putteth it off;" meaning, that he that proudly puts on his armour for battle, was never sure of the victory, for it was not always the larger army that gained it, and the weak might defeat the strong.

The proud Benhadad was extremely angry at the wise answer of Ahab. When it was told him, he was drinking with the princes in his pavilions, or tents, and he ordered his army to get every thing ready for an attack on the city of Samaria.

While these preparations were making, a prophet went to Ahab, and told him that he should gain the victory. And, following the prophet's directions, Ahab collected the princes, or governors, of his provinces, two hundred and thirty-two in number, and put himself at their head, having in reserve, or behind, seven thousand men. And they sallied out from the city to attack Benhadad.

The Syrian king was still drinking till he was drunk, and when he was told that the men of Israel were marching towards him, he made quite sure that they would be conquered, and gave orders that they might be made prisoners. The Syrian army, or at least a part of it, met the men of Israel, and the men of Israel "slew every one his man;" that is, they slew seven thousand two hundred and thirty-two men, as many as they themselves were. The Syrians were frightened at such a bold resistance, and turned their backs, and all the army ran away. "Israel pursued them," and Benhadad mounted his horse, and rode away as fast as he could accompanied by his horsemen. And Ahab smote the Syrian





cavalry, both those that rode on horses, and those that rode in chariots; "and he slew the Syrians with great slaughter." The Jewish historians say that he plundered their camp, where he found a great deal of gold and silver, and that he took their chariots and horses. So Benhadad paid dearly for his insolence towards Israel.

When the battle was gained, the prophet told the king of Israel to be upon his guard, for Benhadad would return again, "at the return of the year," when the fine spring weather again came round, and kings were used to go to war, and that he would bring another large army against him; and so it was.

It is most likely that the little army of Israel, in order to avoid the chariots of the Syrians, had fought their battle on the hills, these chariots not being able to climb them, and so being of no use there. So the counsellors of Benhadad told him, that if they fought another time in the plain, instead of the hills, they should beat Israel; their reason for this advice was, however, very foolish; they were all heathen as well as their master, and they had a notion that different gods ruled over different places, and so they thought that the gods of the hills had fought for Israel, and that next time, if they fought in the plains, the gods of the plains would fight for them. They therefore advised Benhadad to give the command of his troops to brave captains, instead of the princes, who might know less of the art of war, and to raise another army of just the same number as that which had been beaten.

Benhadad followed this advice, and marched forward to Aphek, one of their cities, which, it is probable, his father had taken from Israel, and there the two armies of Israel met him: but Ahab's army was so small that, being divided into two parts, it was like two little flocks of kids, compared with the Syrians, whose numbers covered all the surrounding country.

A prophet again encouraged Ahab, and told him that the wicked Syrians thought that the god of the hills had fought for them before, and that the god of the valleys would not do so, but these wicked idolators should be undeceived, and he should again beat them.

The armies faced one another for seven days, and at last they





fought, and the Israelites slew an hundred thousand of the Syrians, for God had given up these boasting idolators to be punished for their wickedness. Twenty-seven thousand yet remained who took shelter in Aphek, but there the city wall fell upon them, and they also were slain; either the Israelites dug under some parts of the wall, and so caused it to fall, or God sent a high wind, or an earthquake, and blew or shook it down.

Benhadad, who would have ruined Israel, was now ruined himself; and God often permits wicked people to suffer from their own doings, and the mischief they intended for others falls upon themselves. In his last extremity, he hid himself in a secret chamber in the city, where his counsellors, seeing that all was lost, advised him to let them go to the king of Israel, who was reported to be merciful, and they would put on sackcloth and ropes, in token of their humiliation, and that they deserved to be hanged, and they would beg for Benhadad's life to be saved.

The plan succeeded. Ahab, pleased enough that he was conqueror, would not hurt Benhadad, and was glad that he was alive, and called him his brother. Now he was not his brother as an Israelite, but only his brother king, and Ahab looked more at royalty than at religion; so he spared an idolatrous king, whom God had given into his hands for punishment. In almost any other case, such kindness would have been much to the credit of Ahab's disposition, but here it was wrong, as he was sparing a wicked king who would be a curse to Israel, and who ought to have been executed as a public malefactor. Ahab then sent for Benhadad, and took him into his chariot, and made a covenant of peace with him, and sent him away.

After this, one of the prophets said to his neighbour, or another prophet, "Smite me, I pray thee:" and because his neighbour did not smite him, a lion met him and slew him. Now, to understand this, you must recollect that God's prophets very often spoke by signs, and when he commanded his neighbour to smite him, he ought to have remembered that it was a command intended by God to represent something very important. As the prophet who asked for the blow had done him no harm, it would have been very proper to refuse his request, had he been any other than a





prophet; but, in refusing a prophet, he disobeyed the voice of God, which he ought to have remembered, spoke by him. It was for this that he was killed by the lion, for it is a fearful thing to disobey God. The prophet then got another man to smite him, who made him bleed; and then he put ashes on his face in token of distress, and to disguise himself; and he waited for the king when he should pass along the highway, and he made out a parable for him—for, remember, what he said was not a lie, told with an intention to deceive him, but a parable, with an intention to reprove him. This makes the grand difference between a lie and a parable, which you might otherwise suppose to be very much alike. He told the king that he had been in battle, which he had not; and that a man was committed to his keeping, which was not true; and that he was to forfeit his life, if he let the man go; and that he did let him escape; and so he hoped the king would get him out of his difficulty. . The king, so far from this, gave him to understand that he had condemned himself by his own story, and so, for letting the man go he must take the consequences. Now, you will see that, though this was not true as it respected the prophet, it was true enough as a parable; for, under this story, the prophet stated the case of the king, into whose hands God had delivered Benhadad, the enemy of Israel, but, instead of securing him, he had let him escape. "Thus saith the Lord," added the prophet, "Because thou hast let go out of thy hand a man whom I appointed to utter destruction, therefore thy life shall go for his life, and thy people for his people." Ahab did not like this reproof, and so "went to his house heavy and displeased."



THE TWENTY-FIRST CHAPTER OF I. KINGS.

Naboth robbed of his Vineyard, and murdered by Ahab and Jezebel.

"And the word of the Lord came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying, 'Arise, go down to meet Ahab king of Israel, which is in Samaria: behold, he is in the vineyard of Naboth, whither he is gone down to possess it.'

"And thou shalt speak unto him, saying, Thus saith the Lord, Hast thou killed, and also taken possession? And thou shalt speak unto him, saying, Thus saith the Lord, In the place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth shall dogs lick thy blood, even thine."—Vers. 17—19.

Great riches do not always make men contented and happy ; poor men are often more happy than princes. Only they who truly love and serve God can, after all, be called truly happy. Ahab had saved all his dignity and wealth, and even got more by the spoils taken from the king of Syria ; but no sooner was he freed from the troubles of war, than his mind became dissatisfied, because he could not get possession of a small piece of ground near his palace in Jezreel, which was a vineyard of Naboth, and which he thought would make a nice kitchen-garden. He did, indeed, offer Naboth the choice of a better vineyard for it, or its value in money, but Naboth refused, because the people of Israel were commanded, by God's law, not to sell their lands from their family, or tribe, except in cases of great poverty—and Naboth was not a poor man—and, even then, the sale was not to be for more than forty-nine years at the most. (Lev. xxv. 23, 28.)

Ahab was very much vexed that he could not get the vineyard, and he went home and threw himself upon the bed, and would not eat, just like a poor peevish child that has been disappointed of some toy, or prevented in having some improper wish gratified.

Then Jezebel, his wife, asked the reason of his sadness, and he told her. "Dost thou now govern the kingdom of Israel?" said she, then "I will give thee the vineyard." Meaning that he had nothing to fear about any way in which he might get the vineyard, so he obtained it.





So she contrived a wicked plan to ruin Naboth. She wrote letters, in Ahab's name, to all the chief rulers of Jezreel, and sealed them with the king's seal, which made them of the same consequence as if he had written them himself; and she told them to proclaim a fast, which was under a pretence that something evil existed in the land, for which they were to mourn; and when they were assembled, with Naboth amongst them, some men were to be ready who should swear that Naboth had blasphemed God and the king. Two witnesses would be enough by the law to prove him guilty, and then, by that law, he must instantly be stoned to death, and for his pretended words against the king, his property would be forfeited to Ahab, and so he would not only get the vineyard, but all that he had.

Now, as Israel, and especially Jezreel, was in a very idolatrous state, it was easy to find bad rulers to obey these wicked commands of this most wicked queen; and two children of Belial,—or worthless, lawless, abandoned creatures, which is what the name means,—swore falsely against poor Naboth, who was instantly taken away and stoned to death.

As soon as the news reached the queen, she told the king, and he went directly to take possession of the vineyard. But though he had succeeded in his wickedness so far, God had looked at what was doing all the while, and he ordered Elijah to go and meet him in the vineyard. As soon as Ahab saw Elijah, he said, "Hast thou found me, O mine enemy?" Why, how did he know that he was his enemy? He might have been commanded to tell him something good. But Ahab's conscience told him he had done wrong; and Elijah told him that God would punish him for this crime, and that the dogs should lick up his blood, as they had that of the innocent man whom he had caused to be killed. He also told him that all his family should be cut off like the families of Jeroboam and of Baasha, because he had been more wicked than even they were, and that "the dogs should eat Jezebel by the wall of Jezreel," where she had been so cruel and so wicked.

Ahab was now alarmed, and rent his clothes, and clothed himself in sackcloth, and fasted, in token of grief and repentance.





and walked softly about, pacing with slow steps, as one who was melancholy. And though he had been so wicked, God spared him all the evil that was to come upon his house; but it came to pass entirely in his son's days, who was nevertheless deserving of what he suffered, for following all the wicked and idolatrous ways of his father.

THE TWENTY-SECOND CHAPTER OF I. KINGS.

Ahab killed in Battle.

“And a certain man drew a bow at a venture, and smote the king of Israel between the joints of the harness.”—Ver. 34.

After Ahab made his covenant with Benhadad, they remained at peace for three years. It was probably agreed at that time that Ramoth-Gilead should be restored to Israel, but Benhadad had not kept his word. This made Ahab very angry. Jehoshaphat, the king of Judah, being on a visit to Ahab, Ahab asked him if he would join him in going to war with the king of Syria, in order to take this city, which, by agreement, belonged to him. Jehoshaphat agreed, and said, “I am as thou art, my people as thy people, my horses as thy horses;” meaning that both he and all that he had, were at his service for the purpose.

Jehoshaphat, was, however, a very pious king, and he did not like to go to battle till he knew whether it was right; so he advised Ahab to ask counsel of God. Ahab directly called together four hundred of his false prophets, and asked them if he should do right in going to Ramoth-Gilead. And they, willing to please the king, who, as they knew, strongly wished it, said to him, “Go up; for the Lord shall deliver it into the hand of the king.”

This was like the prophecies of false prophets, spoken in such a way that it was difficult to know whether the battle should be won or not, or which king should win it. However, it seemed to lean on the side of Ahab, and he liked the answer very well, and interpreted it as he wished it to be.

Jehoshaphat was not quite satisfied. He most likely knew that





the prophets which had been collected were not prophets of the Lord, and so he asked if there were no other prophets whose advice could be taken. And Ahab said there was another certainly, one Micaiah, but he hated him, for this prophet never prophesied any thing good for him. (See 2 Chron. xviii. 7.) This was a prophet who had before reproved him for his sins, and wicked men do not like to be reproved for sin. It was, however, very foolish of Ahab, to blame a faithful prophet for speaking what God told him; but wicked men like to have their own course against all good counsel, and so they seek their own ruin; and this was the case with Ahab.

Ahab, at Jehoshaphat's wish, sent for Micaiah, who is thought at the time to have been in prison for his former boldness to the king of Israel. And now the two kings sat on thrones in great state near the gate of Samaria, and heard what all the prophets had to say. "And Zedekiah, the son of Chenaanah, made him horns of iron," in imitation of the manner of the true prophets, who prophesied by signs, and he told Ahab that he should push his enemies as with those horns till he had destroyed them. And all the prophets said, "Go up to Ramoth-Gilead, and prosper: for the Lord shall deliver it into the king's hand."

The messenger who fetched Micaiah told him what the false prophets said, and advised him to say the same. However Micaiah could only say what God impressed on his mind, and he would not deceive the king. Yet, as he knew that the king would only follow the advice of the false prophets, he repeated their words, "Go and prosper; for the Lord shall deliver it into the hand of the king."

The king saw that he did not speak the words of God, but was only ridiculing him and his prophets, and he was angry, and desired him with authority to tell him the truth. Micaiah then did so, and told him that he saw all Israel scattered like sheep on the hills, that have no shepherd to lead them. Though Ahab had desired him to speak nothing but the truth, and was angry when he spoke the exact words of the false prophets, he was now angry that he had prophesied evil things; for he saw that the scattered sheep meant that Israel were to be defeated, and that their being without a shepherd, meant that he, Ahab, was to be slain. And





he turned to Jehoshaphat, and told him he expected some ill-natured prophecy from Micaiah. Then Micaiah spoke a parable, and told him he saw a council in heaven. And the Lord asked his angels who should go and deceive Ahab, that he might fall at Ramoth-Gilead. And after different opinions had been given, a spirit came and said, I will go, and I will be a lying spirit speaking by Ahab's prophets. Micaiah told him, moreover, that God had allowed these wicked prophets to deceive him.

Then Zedekiah smote him on the cheek, and insulted him on his prophesying; and the king ordered him to be sent back to prison, and to be kept on bread and water till he returned. Micaiah again warned him, and told him if he returned safe, then God had not spoken by him.

Being hastily bent on having his own way, Ahab went to battle, and Jehoshaphat went with him. However, he seems to have had some fears lest what Micaiah said might come true, and so he disguised himself and advised Jehoshaphat to wear his royal robes. In giving this advice, he appeared to do honour to Jehoshaphat, but, in reality, he was treacherous to him, and put him into the danger which he feared himself, hoping that, if a king was to be killed, Jehoshaphat, having a royal dress, would be sure to be marked instead of himself. How stupid he must have been to suppose that, when God said by his true prophet he should fall, such an artifice could be of any service to him! But he was just like all wicked people, who, when God's word tells them they are doing wrong, and their consciences are afraid that what he threatens against sin and sinners will, at last, overtake them, still pursue their evil courses, till it is too late to repent.

The king of Syria gave particular orders to his people to look for the king of Israel, and to fight with him, for he thought that if he were either killed or taken prisoner, the whole army would be thrown into confusion. As he was disguised, they mistook Jehoshaphat for him, and had nearly killed him, till he cried out, and they found that he was the king of Judah, and not the king of Israel. It was strange that they neither attempted to kill or take him, though he was fighting against them, but "turned back from pursuing him." You see how dangerous a thing it is to be





in bad company. The pious Jehoshaphat had nearly been slain by being mistaken for the wicked Ahab. "My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not."

With all his cunning and caution, Ahab could not escape. Ben-hadad's captains and soldiers could not, indeed, discover him in his disguise, but God permitted an arrow that was not shot at him in particular, to give him a mortal wound. This was the more remarkable, as the arrow was not only not aimed at him any more than at any other soldier, but he being covered all over with armour, or, as we say, quite cased in it, there were but two or three places where he could be hit to be mortally wounded; and just in one of those places the arrow entered. "A certain man drew a bow at a venture, and smote the king of Israel between the joints of the harness," or one of the places where a piece of the metal armour fitted with another piece.

Finding himself wounded, Ahab desired the driver of his war-chariot to take him out of the thickest of the battle—most likely that he might have his wound dressed—and then, being propped up, he continued sometime longer on the field, while both sides fought furiously. By the evening he died, "and the blood ran out of the wound into the midst of the chariot." The army were ordered to withdraw from the field, and they all marched home, and, as it had been a severe battle, the Syrians did not pursue them. Ahab was buried in Samaria. And now what was threatened by the prophet took place; he had said, "Thus saith the Lord, In the place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth, shall dogs lick thy blood, even thine." "And one washed the chariot in the pool of Samaria; and the dogs licked up his blood; and they washed his armour; according unto the word of the Lord which he spake."

Nothing more is said of Ahab than that he built an ivory house; or, more properly, a house inlaid with ivory ornaments in its wood-work. Ahab was succeeded by his son Ahaziah.

Jehoshaphat, of whom we have just read, was the son of the pious Asa; he began to reign over Judah in the fourth year of Ahab's reign. This reign lasted twenty-five years. "He turned not aside from doing that which was right in the eyes of the Lord," and he turned many of the wicked people out of the land.





Jehoshaphat did wrong in joining with the wicked Ahab in battle, and we see he suffered for it; he also did wrong in joining Ahaziah, his wicked son, in making a fleet to fetch gold from Ophir, for the fleet was wrecked; he, however, refused a second time to have any thing to do with Ahaziah, and would not let any of Ahaziah's seamen go with his in a new fleet which he seems to have built. When we see plainly that we have done what is displeasing to God, we can never act more wisely than Jehoshaphat did in not doing it again. We should always avoid forming any sort of alliance with the wicked, it will be sure to do us some harm.

Ahaziah began to reign over Israel when Jehoshaphat had reigned nearly seventeen years over Judah. His reign was very short, being only two years. He was as wicked as his father, though he saw to what his wickedness had brought him, in disobeying God's voice by his prophet; and he walked in his father's ways, and in those of his wicked mother, Jezebel, and worshipped the idol, Baal, and so provoked God. We shall read his sad end in the next Book of Kings.





"So he consented to them in this matter, and proved them ten days."

DANIEL, 1: 14.





ELISHA PARTING THE WATERS.



ELIJAH FED BY RAVENS.



THE
CHILD'S
COMMENTATOR

THE SECOND BOOK OF KINGS,
OR,
THE HISTORY OF THE KINGS OF JUDAH AND ISRAEL

THE FIRST CHAPTER OF II. KINGS.

Sickness and Death of Ahaziah, and Destruction of a hundred of his Soldiers by Fire from Heaven.

“So he died according to the word of the Lord, which Elijah had spoken.”—Ver. 17.

I told you, in the last chapter, that Ahaziah succeeded his father Ahab, as king over Israel, and that, like his father, he was a very wicked man, and that, in this Book of Kings, we should learn how he died.





It appears that his reign was disturbed, and that Moab rebelled against him—that is, refused to pay a tribute which had been paid from the times of David, when “the Moabites became David’s servants, and brought gifts.”

It was while he was thus troubled by the Moabites that a yet greater trouble came upon him, for he “fell down through a lattice in his upper chamber, that was in Samaria, and was sick.” He either trode on some fine wood-work, made to let in light by the ceiling of a chamber below him, when he was walking on the roof, or he leaned against some fine rail-work on the top of the house, and so fell over, and hurt himself severely.

Now we may see what kind of a man he was, for, instead of asking God to cure him, or to bless the means used for his cure, “he sent messengers, and said unto them, Go, inquire of Baal-zebub, the God of Ekron, whether I shall recover of this disease.” It does not, indeed, appear that he thought this fancied god could cure him; however, he was foolish enough to suppose that he could tell him whether he should get well or not. But who was this Baal-zebub? An idol worshipped by the wicked Philistines, who lived in Ekron, a part of the country belonging to that people. The people are supposed to have thought that this god had a particular ability in driving away flies, with which, it is believed, Ekron was infested. However, this was so detestable an idol, that, in the New Testament, his name or one nearly the same (Beelzebub) is given to Satan himself.

While the king’s messengers were going to Ekron, God sent an angel to Elijah, the prophet, to tell him to go and meet them; and to ask them whether it was because there was no God of whom they could inquire in Israel, that they were going to Ekron. Elijah also told them, in a particular manner belonging to the prophets, addressing the king as though he were there, “Now, therefore, thus saith the Lord, Thou shalt not come down from that bed on which thou art gone up, but shalt surely die.” In the Eastern countries, the beds were placed in a sort of gallery, railed in, and so they were got into by steps; this explains the threat, “Thou shalt not come down.”

The messengers quickly returned, and Ahaziah, wondering why





they had come back so soon, said, "Why are ye now turned back?" Then they told him what had passed between them and Elijah, but they did not know who Elijah was. However, they said, "he was a hairy man"—most likely wearing a garment made of camel's hair, as the prophets sometimes did; and that he was "girt with a girdle of leather about his loins." And, from his message, and their description of his dress, as Ahaziah had seen him before, in his father's court, he said, "It is Elijah the Tishbite."

So the king sent a captain with fifty men to go after him, and seize him. When they came within call of him, he was sitting on the top of a hill, and they spoke in a ridiculing way to him, and sneered at him as a man of God; just as wicked people sometimes sneer at good people now, and call them good names as well as bad ones in a way of mockery; or make sport of them as saints, or sanctified people, or praying people. You may think it strange that any should laugh at people for serving God, but it has always been so, and it always will be so, in this wicked world; only in heaven people will serve God without being ridiculed; for there the wicked cannot enter. Well, these soldiers mocked Elijah, and said, "You man of God there, the king orders you to come down, and go with us directly;" for that was the meaning of their words, "Thou man of God, the king hath said, Come down." This was not the way to speak to one of God's messengers, especially to a prophet like Elijah. So Elijah said words in reply, which meant as much as to say, "Well, since you ridicule me as God's prophet, you shall know whether I am or not, by fire coming down from heaven, and consuming you." Then fire came from heaven—most likely a flash of lightning—and killed them all on the spot. Now, Elijah did not punish the men in anger because they had insulted *him*; indeed, he could not do it—God alone could send the fire; but he spoke as God's prophet, because they had insulted *God*, and, as God sent the lightning, it was he who punished the wicked soldiers as he threatened by his prophet.

Whether the king was impatient at the delay of the soldiers, and so sent others, or whether he was more enraged at Elijah for the loss of his men, and so resolved more firmly that he would have him, is not certain; however, he sent fifty more men, who





behaved in the same way, and met with the same punishment. See how dangerous it is to obey the commands, and to imitate the words and ways, of the wicked.

The wicked king was still determined that he would take Elijah, and so he sent yet a third company of fifty soldiers to apprehend him. The captain obeyed the king's orders, and went to Elijah, and when he saw his hundred comrades all lying dead around him—which he must have done—he did not dare to mock, but he fell on his knees before Elijah, and entreated for mercy.

Elijah now, being ordered by an angel, went down to the king, and, as soon as he saw him, he repeated to him the word of God which he had sent before by the messengers. "So he died according to the word of the Lord, which Elijah had spoken. And Jehoram reigned in his stead." This Jehoram was brother to Ahaziah, he having left no son to reign after him. There was also another Jehoram who afterwards reigned in Judah, and who was the son of Jehoshaphat.

THE SECOND CHAPTER OF II. KINGS.

Elijah taken to Heaven in a Chariot of Fire—Children who mocked Elisha killed by Bears.

"And Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven."—Ver. 11.

The prophet Elijah had done much for the honour of God, and God has said, "Them that honour me, I will honour." "Enoch walked with God" by keeping in his ways, "and he was not, for God took him"—not as he takes us, by death, but he took him to heaven without dying. So God honoured Elijah in the same way. But before he was to leave this world, Elijah visited the schools of the prophets at Bethel and Jericho. He would have had Elisha leave him, that he might ascend to heaven unperceived, not wishing to appear proud of the honour God was going to bestow upon him, for good men always abhor pride. Elisha,





however, went with him from place to place, where he was asked, by the other prophets, if he knew that Elijah was going to heaven that day; and he said he knew it.

After visiting Bethel and Jericho, they came to the river Jordan. Here fifty of the sons of the prophets, who had followed them six miles from Jericho, stood at a distance to see if they could behold Elijah's ascent into glory.

When Elijah and Elisha came to the water, Elijah folded up his robe and smote the stream, and the river divided, so that he and Elisha passed over on dry ground, just as the Israelites had done before.

Then Elijah asked Elisha if he had any particular favor to ask before he left him, and Elisha wished for a double portion of Elijah's spirit. What he meant was this: Elijah, as a prophet, had a remarkable spirit of piety, and knowledge, and courage, given him by God; and, as he might serve the cause of God, even more than Elijah, if he had twice his abilities, he wished to be so favoured. Israel were still very wicked, and Elisha hoped that, with this double portion of Elijah's spirit, he might the better reprove and withstand their wickedness.

Elijah said it was a hard or difficult thing that Elisha asked, and one not commonly bestowed; but, if God should permit Elisha to see him ascend, it would be a proof that he was pleased with him for what he asked, and so he should have it.

"And it came to pass, as they still went on and talked, that, behold, there appeared a chariot of fire, and horses of fire, and parted them both asunder; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven." I cannot attempt to explain this, and so I have given the account exactly in the words of Scripture. Whatever this chariot was, looking like fire, it is evident that it did not burn or hurt the prophet—so that its bright appearance was only to show that Elijah was going in a glorious way to a glorious place.

Elisha saw this glorious ascent, and this encouraged him to hope for the double portion of Elijah's spirit. And he cried, "My father, my father, the chariot of Israel and the horsemen thereof!" by which he is supposed to have meant that Elijah's counsels and prayers were as much defence to Israel, as an army of war





chariots and horsemen. When Elijah was gone he began to feel his loss, and he took his clothes, and, as a sign of grief for losing so great and good a prophet, he "rent them in two pieces."

The mantle of Elijah fell from him, and Elisha took it up, and, as Elijah had smitten Jordan and divided the waters with it, Elisha tried to do the same, and called out while he was trying, "Where is the Lord God of Elijah?"—meaning, "Now let God divide these waters by me, his prophet, as he did by Elijah;" for it was not the mantle nor the prophet that divided the waters, but God did so when the prophets looked to him to bless the sign they used. "And when he had smitten the waters, they parted hither and thither." This miracle was seen by the sons of the prophets from Jericho, and when they saw that Elisha passed over dry land in the middle of the river, they knew that God had given him Elijah's power, and they met him, and paid him reverence as a great prophet of God like Elijah.

Then the sons of the prophets wished much to go and seek for the body of Elijah, which, they supposed, might have been left on some high mountain, while his spirit went up to glory. This was not unreasonable, for they knew that the body returned to dust, while the soul of the good man went to God, and, therefore, they wished to find Elijah's body, and bury it with all possible respect. Elisha refused, at first, to let them go, but, at last, as they pressed him very much, he gave them leave. However, after searching three days, they could not find the body; and, indeed, how could they, for Elijah did not die like other men, but was taken at once, body and spirit, into glory.

Seeing that Elisha had now the spirit of Elijah, who had worked miracles, or done things which no skill of man can do, the sons of the prophets at Jericho complained that, though their city was very pleasant to look at, yet their water was very bad, and their ground brought nothing to perfection. This barrenness was, most likely, because Jericho had been built again, as we have before read, in spite of the curse pronounced against it by Joshua, the servant of God.

So Elisha took a cruise, and put a little salt into it, and then went to the spring whence the waters flowed, and cast the salt into





the spring, and told the sons of the prophets that the waters were now pure; and, in future, they need not fear to drink them, for they would not produce disease or death, as bad water did; nor should they complain of their fruit failing, for these waters should now strengthen all the trees. "So the waters were healed." Salt, you know, will make water unpleasant to drink, but here it was the contrary, and this showed that it was a miracle, and that the prophet had a divine power to make salt produce sweet water.

Elisha went next to visit the sons of the prophets at Bethel. Before he reached the town, it was known he was about to enter it, and some wicked children—perhaps set on by wicked parents—went out of the city to meet Elisha, and to laugh at him. Even now, you know, wicked children will sometimes mock good children, and even good men, and ministers of Jesus Christ. Elisha seems to have had a bald head, and they thought this would do to laugh at, and so they cried, "Go up, thou bald-head; go up, thou bald-head!" Some think that they meant to make fun of Elijah's going to heaven, and so they cried thus, signifying, "Go along with you, after your master Elijah, and don't come here, you bald-headed fellow."

Now, even if Elijah had not been a prophet of God, this behaviour would have been very rude, and as wicked as it was rude, for we ought never to laugh at any defects of body which people may have about them, but, if they are bad, we should rather pity them.

Elisha gave them a look of rebuke, and then, as God's prophet, he "cursed them in the name of the Lord." This means that he pronounced God's curse upon them, for it would have been wicked for him to have cursed them in the way in which bad men curse people, and which can only do harm to themselves. This was, therefore, not in rage and revenge, for Elisha would not then have acted like a good man. As soon as he had spoken, "there came forth two she-bears out of the wood, and tare forty and two children of them." Observe, these were she-bears, and probably had young ones, and so were more ferocious than he-bears. They might hear the noise of these wicked children mocking Elisha, and so they came out to get some prey; but still God so ordered it that the





mockers might be punished, as a warning both to their wicked companions and to all young persons in future times, not to make a sport of sacred things.

After this the prophet returned to Samaria, the chief city of the kingdom of Israel, where there was much idolatry, and where he was to oppose the wickedness of the people.

THE THIRD CHAPTER OF II. KINGS.

Israel miraculously supplied with Water, and the Moabites defeated.

“And when they came to the camp of Israel, the Israelites rose up and smote the Moabites, so that they fled before them; but they went forward, smiting the Moabites, even in their country.”—Ver. 24.

We have before read that Jehoram, the brother of Ahaziah and son of Ahab, now sat on the throne of Israel. Jehoram was not a good man, but he was better than his father, as “he put away the image of Baal, that his father had made” for the people to worship, but he still worshipped calves as Jeroboam did.

Moab, you remember, was forced by David to pay taxes to Israel. When Ahaziah died, we told you that the Moabites had rebelled. Taxes were then often paid in cattle, which were valuable. “And Mesha, king of Moab, was a sheep-master;” he kept a great number of sheep, “and rendered unto the king of Israel a hundred thousand lambs, and a hundred thousand rams, with the wool.”

This tribute was thought by Jehoram to be too valuable to lose. So he numbered all his soldiers, to see how many he could raise against Moab. And he asked Jehoshaphat, the king of Judah, if he would join him, and help him, which Jehoshaphat agreed to. Then they set off, and took the king of Edom also along with them. They had to travel seven days, and they could find no water, so that the army and cattle had nearly died of thirst, for want of wells.





The king of Israel was now very much frightened, and knew not what to do. The good king Jehoshaphat, however, helped him out of his difficulty, by asking if he had not a prophet of the Lord to direct him. Now, it so happened—or, rather, God had so ordered it to save this army—that Elisha had followed the king, and one of the king's servants told him he was there: "Here," said he, "is Elisha, the son of Shaphat, which poured water on the hands of Elijah"—meaning that he had been an attendant upon Elijah, and so poured water on his hands as those who waited on their superiors used to do. So the kings went to Elisha.

And Elisha spoke very roughly to the king of Israel, and told him that if the good king Jehoshaphat had not been with him, he would have said nothing to him; but he might have asked his own false prophets to direct him, and so have perished. Oh, it is a happy thing to be a companion of them that fear God!

Elisha then called for a minstrel—one that was used to play on a harp and sing psalms to it—and so his mind became composed to wait for what God should impress upon it.

Then he told the kings to employ the soldiers to dig ditches all about the valley where they were, and though they should hear no wind to bring clouds with it, and see no rain falling, yet the ditches should be all filled with water, enough for the whole army and the beasts. Then he told them that God would defeat Moab, and they were to punish this wicked people, and destroy their cities, their trees, and their wells of water, and cover their land with stones, so that it could not be ploughed for any thing to grow upon it.

The Moabites now gathered a large army, and stood on the borders of their land to defend it; and early in the morning, as they were watching the motions of the king's armies, they saw the reflection of the sun upon the water in the ditches, and, as it looked very red, they mistook it for blood, and made sure that the kings had quarrelled, and that their armies had slain each other; so, without giving themselves time to think, they agreed to go directly and share the spoil.

Then they all hurried, in disorder, to the camp of Israel, when the Israelites fell upon them, and slew them, and pursued them to





their own country. And they pulled down their cities ; and they strewed stones, perhaps the stones of the houses, on the fields ; which, being done by every man, soon covered them enough to spoil them for the plough ; and they put dirt into the wells, and cut down the good trees, and left but one place untouched, named Kir-harasath, which, however, was knocked down by machines.

The king of Moab was desperate, and he tried to break through that part of the army where the king of Edom was, taking with him seven hundred choice men, but he could not succeed.

Then, in order to get his idol, Chemosh, to help him, he even took his own son, heir to his crown, and offered him up for a burnt-offering, foolishly supposing that his false god would then be pleased, and that he should be able to beat Israel, against whom he and his people were now in a great rage.

You cry, "What a barbarous thing to offer up his son !" It was indeed, and makes one shudder at the thought of it ; but such cruel deeds have been, and still are, common among idolators.

You read, indeed, of God's commanding Abraham to offer up his son Isaac for a burnt-offering ; but then this was only to try if he would be willing to do all that God commanded him, even to the sacrificing of his son, and he did not let him do it. God is not a being who delights in the blood of men, though they often seem, by their cruel acts, to take delight in shedding each other's blood. His command is, "Thou shalt not kill."

But all the nations that have not served God have been very cruel, and they have offered up human creatures, that is, killed them on their altars, that their blood might be the means, as they fancied, of getting pardon for the sins that they knew they had done, and of bringing blessings upon them. The people called Ethiopians, or Africans, used to sacrifice boys to the sun, and girls to the moon, and they now often kill great numbers of innocent men for sacrifice. The Scythians, or old Russians, used to sacrifice every hundredth man of their prisoners taken in war, as a sign of thanks to their gods. The Egyptians killed red-haired men as an acceptable sacrifice to one of their gods : and they used often to sacrifice a beautiful young





woman to their river Nile, as a sign of gratitude to the river for watering their lands; they dressed her up very richly, and then flung her into the stream, where she was drowned, or, more likely, devoured by that horrible creature, the crocodile. The Persians used to bury people alive in honour of their gods. The Gallic Druids—a set of priests who lived a very long time ago in France—used to set up an immense and tall figure of a man, made of wicker-work, and twisted it round about as many as a hundred human victims, and then consumed the whole as an offering to their gods. And the Druids, who lived at that time in England, more especially in the Isle of Anglesea, used constantly to sacrifice the prisoners they took in war. The Athenians used to sacrifice a man every year, after having first loaded him with curses, that, as they supposed, the wrath of God might fall upon his head, and so take it away from them. The Carthaginians, a people who lived in Africa, were even known to have offered two hundred victims at one time; and so cruel were they in their sacrifices, that it was usual for the father to slaughter the most beautiful of his children, or those he loved best, because he thought that sacrifice would best please his cruel god. The Danes, on one occasion, sacrificed ninety-nine slaves. Two hundred children were sacrificed at once, in Peru, for the health of one great person, which, it was fancied, would be gained by the wicked act; and the Mexicans used to have thousands of victims. Only a few years ago, the South Sea Islanders used to sacrifice men, but the preaching of the Gospel by the missionaries, has caused them to throw away their wooden gods, and to destroy their bloody altars. But, to this day, some African nations kill their prisoners; some people, in the East Indies, fatten human victims for slaughter; and some even eat their criminals and prisoners of war as a religious act. This is done now in Polynesia. Had you been born among some of these people, you might have been butchered in your childhood, or in your youth, or left to suffer all these cruelties as a man or woman.

How much ought you to thank God that you are born in a Christian land, where these things are abhorred, and where we learn to be kind to each other!





Above all, how ought you to bless God that you know where to look when you feel yourself a guilty creature and in need of mercies. Not to the sacrifices of sinful creatures like yourself, but to that dear Saviour who gave himself up to die as a criminal, taking our place in which we deserved to stand, that by his "one offering" we might, through faith in him, obtain pardon and acceptance with God, and everlasting blessedness.

"Jesus, my Saviour, died,
I trust on him alone;
No sacrifice beside
Could for my sins atone.
With heart and soul, I'll love and praise
My gracious Saviour all my days."

THE FOURTH CHAPTER OF II. KINGS.

Various Miracles by Elisha.

The Widow's Oil multiplied—The Shunammite promised a Son, and that Son afterwards brought to life—The deadly Pottage made good—A hundred Men fed with twenty small Loaves.

"Behold, now I perceive that this is an holy man of God."—Ver. 9.

Elisha had a double portion of Elijah's spirit; and the power God gave him of working miracles, was often used by him to do good to those who were in trouble. In this chapter we have several instances of his kindness.

A poor widow of one of the sons of the prophet had been left by her husband, not only without money, but in debt. This would have been wrong in him if his debts were carelessly incurred; but it was most likely that he had been among the prophets persecuted by the wicked Jezebel, and so deprived of support. Now when people owed money, at that time, they were not only obliged to give up what they had to pay it, but even their children to be sold for slaves. This poor widow had two sons, and the creditor, or person to whom she owed money, as she had nothing left to pay, came to her and demanded her sons. The poor widow loved them too well to part with them; but what could





she do, as she could not pay the debt? In her distress she thought on Elisha, and ran to him with her tale. Elisha kindly said, "What shall I do for thee? Tell me, what hast thou in the house?" The poor woman had only a pot of oil, and that would not pay the bill. Elisha then told her to go and borrow ever so many empty vessels—pots, or anything else she could find—and to shut herself up with her two sons, and keep pouring the oil she had as long as it would run, and she would find all the vessels full. And when she had filled them, he told her to go and sell the oil, and pay her debt, and she would then have oil left for herself and sons to live upon, as oil was, and still is, an important article of food in that part of the world.

How I should have liked to have seen this poor widow after the prophet had enabled her to pay her bill, by God's help, for he could not have done this of himself. I dare say her face looked quite delighted, and her sons were happy enough not to be taken away from so affectionate a mother. We cannot work miracles, like Elisha, but how many wounded hearts may we heal by doing good to the poor! May God always make us tender-hearted, as he is tender-hearted towards us!

In his journeys to visit the schools of the prophets, Elisha often passed through a place called Shunem. After the hospitable manner of the country, a rich lady, who lived there, seeing him in want of refreshment and rest, invited him to her house, and, having received a hearty invitation to look in whenever he passed that way, he often called upon her. She soon found out that he was a prophet, and saw that he was a good prophet. She, therefore, begged her husband to build him a little chamber for his own use, where he might be undisturbed by the family when he passed that way; and she would have it furnished with a bed, and a table, and a stool, and a candlestick, so as to make it quite comfortable for him. And the chamber was built and furnished, and Elisha, and his servant, Gehazi, used to lodge there.

Elisha was very grateful for this kindness, as we ought always to be for any kindness shown to us. And he desired his servant to ask if he could do any thing to serve the family, and procure any place of honour and profit from the king for the kind lady's





husband. And then he asked her himself, but she had quite enough—and was contented with what God had given her. Oh, how happy are they who are like this Shunammite—contented with what God has given them!—for if some people have ever so much, they are always wanting more.

Gehazi, however, thought that if God gave her a son in her old age, who should inherit her property, she would be glad; and as from that son might spring the Messiah—the divine Saviour—which every Israelite hoped would spring from his family, such a blessing would be valued. So, no doubt, the prophet prayed to God, and God sent her a son.

When this little boy had grown up sufficiently to go to his father into the fields, he was out, one harvest day, among the reapers, when he was taken very ill, and he ran to his father, and cried, “My head, my head!” His father ordered a lad to carry him directly to his mother. She fondly took him up on her knees and tried to comfort him; but he had not been long there before he died. How many little children, like this little boy, have been well in the morning and dead at noon! Little children die; little children ought, therefore, to be prepared for heaven. How are they to be prepared? Nothing will prepare them but a new heart. They must have their evil inclinations taken away and better given them in their stead, and so they will have, as it were, a new heart; and they must have their sins against God all pardoned by trusting in Jesus Christ as the only Saviour of sinners; and when they can do so, they will die happy and be happy for ever!

When this Shunammite lost her son, she laid it on the prophet's bed, and had her beast saddled, and rode in haste to his dwelling, at Mount Carmel. Elisha saw her as she was coming, and sent Gehazi to ask her if any thing was the matter, and she answered, “It is well.” You must not suppose that this was an untruth, for, as she was a pious woman, she was sure that whatever happened to her it was well, and that God would make it to turn out so at last.

However, when she got to the man of God, she told him all that had happened to her; but she was too much grieved to speak at





first, and only fell at his feet and clung to his knees. Gehazi would have taken her away, but Elisha desired him to let her alone, for he saw that she was grieved. The Shunammite then gave him to understand that her child was dead. Elisha instantly desired Gehazi to take his walking staff, and to bind up his long garments round his waist, and set off to the dead child, and to make all the haste he could ; so that if he met any persons he knew, he was not even to waste an instant in speaking to them ; and, when he should reach the Shunammite's house, he told him he must lay his staff on the face of the child. But the Shunammite was not satisfied that the servant went alone, and earnestly begged of the prophet that he would go with her. Elisha then kindly granted her request. In the meantime, Gehazi did as the prophet had told him ; but the child did not recover. On arriving at the house, Elisha himself went into the chamber, and, shutting the door, he prayed, " and he went up and lay upon the child, and put his mouth upon his mouth, and his eyes upon his eyes, and his hands upon his hands, and he stretched himself upon the child, and the flesh of the child waxed warm. Then he returned and walked in the house to and fro, and went up and stretched himself upon him ; and the child sneezed seven times, and the child opened his eyes." Elisha, having restored the boy, gave him to his mother, who fell at his feet to express her gratitude, as she had before done to express her grief ; and she took up her child, and went out of the chamber with her heart thankful and glad.

We next find Elisha at Gilgal, when there happened to be " a dearth in the land," or a famine, owing to the dryness of the ground.

The sons of the prophets being assembled to receive his instructions, he ordered that some pottage, or broth, might be got ready for them to eat. And one went out to gather some herbs to put in the pottage ; and, by mistake, he brought in a lap-full that were poisonous. After they were cut into the pottage, and boiled, he poured out for the young men to eat ; but, as soon as they tasted it, they cried out that it was poisoned—" there is death in the pot"—if we eat any more we shall die.

Elisha then called for a little meal, and put it into the pot, and





the poisonous and bitter taste was gone ; and they ate of the pottage, and it hurt none of them. Not that the meal made the pottage better, but God helped the prophet to work this miracle, to show, as he had shown before, that Elisha was a man of God ; and so they had sign upon sign.

Elisha, also, did another miracle while he was teaching these sons of the prophets. He received a small present of twenty barley loaves and some ears of corn, which he desired should be given to the young men to eat. Now there were as many as a hundred there, and this would be nothing amongst them ; and so his servant told him. However, he desired him to give them to the people ; and they all ate and had plenty, and some was left. So God honoured his prophet Elisha.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER OF II. KINGS.

Naaman, the Syrian Captain, cured of Leprosy by Elisha.

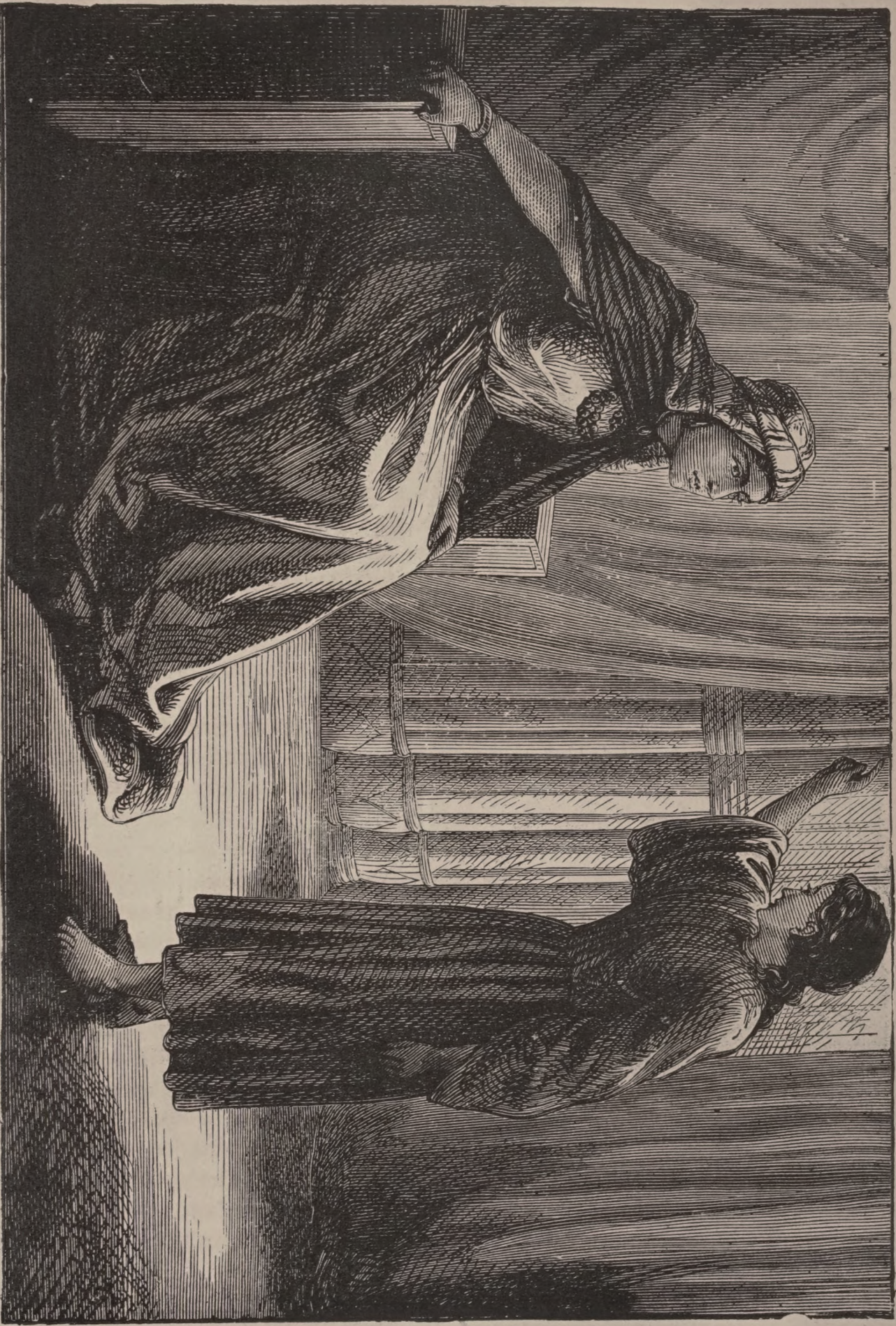
“Then went he down, and dipped himself seven times in Jordan, according to the saying of the man of God ; and his flesh came again like unto the flesh of a little child, and he was clean.”—
Ver. 14.

We have now to relate a very interesting story.

The chief commander of the Syrian army was a great officer, like one of our generals, covered with honours on account of his victories ; his name was Naaman. But this man, with all his greatness, had that terrible disease the leprosy, so that, most probably, nobody liked to touch him, and, as an old bishop once said, “the basest slave in Syria would not change skins with him.”

There is no doubt but Naaman tried every possible way to get cured, but all help was in vain. However, God so permitted it, that one of the plundering parties of the Syrians had entered the territories of Israel, and had carried off a little girl as a prisoner, and she was obliged to be a slave to Naaman's wife, and to wait upon her. War was always a cruel practice : this poor little girl was





NAAMAN'S WIFE AND HER MAID.



ELIJAH RESTORING THE WIDOW'S SON.



taken away from her dear parents, and friends, and country, and sold for money, to be the constant slave of this heathen woman ; for we must suppose that those who captured her, got something for her, as was the usual custom. This little maid, though a slave, did not hate her master for buying her ; but patiently submitted to the lot which God had appointed for her ; she was more happy in her slavery than Naaman in all his greatness, for she was not a leper, while he was, and she knew the prophet of the true God, while he knew nothing about the God of Israel. Her heart was very kind, and when she saw her master suffering under his leprosy from day to day, and no one able to cure him, she said to her mistress, " Would God my lord were with the prophet that is in Samaria ; for he would recover him of his leprosy." This little girl was kind even to her enemies, and wished to return them good for evil. She knew all about the prophet, where he lived, and what wonderful things he did ; how unlike her are some children who know nothing about the ministers of God, or what God does by them ; but have their heads filled with mere idle nonsense. Her knowledge proved a great blessing to her master, and all good servants who really know good things, and practise what they know, must be great blessings to their masters too.

As soon as Naaman was told about what the little maid said, he told his royal master, who directly wrote a letter for him to the king of Israel, supposing that he could as well cure his general as the prophet could. Naaman now set off, and took with him some presents of silver and gold, reckoned at least worth twenty-three thousand dollars of our money, and some suppose, worth above seventy thousand dollars,—and also " ten changes of raiment," so that the present was very great. Health is very valuable, though many throw it away on pleasure and sin, but, when they have lost it, they would readily give all they have to recover it.

Naaman, on his arrival at the Israelitish court, presented his letter to the king, in which Naaman's master said, he had sent his servant to him to cure him of his leprosy. When the king of Israel had read it, he burst into a great rage, and rent his clothes, as the Jews did when they heard or read any thing that was blasphemous, and he asked, " Am I God, to kill and to make





alive?" He also thought the letter was meant to insult him, and to make a quarrel. Elisha, however, soon heard of what had happened, and he sent to the king, begging him to let Naaman go to him, and he should soon know there was a prophet in Israel that could cure him.

Then Naaman went in a very stately way to the dwelling of the prophet, "with his horses, and with his chariot, and stood at the door of the house of Elisha." So Elisha sent out to him to tell him to go and wash seven times in the river Jordan, and he would be well. When Naaman heard this, he was extremely angry, for he thought the prophet would have waited upon him himself, and have waved his hand over his leprosy, and called upon his God, and so have cured him. Besides, there were rivers in Syria far better, in his opinion, than the river Jordan. And he was going away quite disgusted, when his servants respectfully told him that the remedy was very simple, and he might as well try it. So he was persuaded, and went and did as the prophet told him, and was cured.

Naaman was, nevertheless, grateful when he was cured, as we all should be for any kindness done to us,—for he returned to the prophet, told him that he was now sure that the God of Israel was the only God in the world, and begged him to accept of his presents. Elisha, however, refused every thing, for he thought God would be more honoured if the cure were wrought without pay. God's servants are always desirous of honouring him, even if they make a great sacrifice to do it; for the money would have been very useful both to himself and the other poor prophets.

Naaman now asked leave to take away a little of the earth of the land of Israel, that he might build an altar to the Lord with it, for he resolved in future to worship no other god but the God of Israel. He could as well have built the altar of any other earth, but he now loved the very soil of the country in which he was cured, though he had before thought so meanly of its waters.

As Naaman resolved to worship God only, he did not know what he should do when he got back to his own country, and attended his royal master in the house of Rimmon, the idol which he worshipped; and he hoped that, as his heart would no longer





be engaged in the wicked service, God would pardon his attendance on his master. This was not right, for he ought rather to have lost his master's favour, than to have so much as appeared to worship an idol; however, he had just begun to learn his religion, and so the prophet was not angry with him, but, in pity to him, told him to go home in peace.

Naaman had not gone far before he was overtaken by Gehazi, the servant of Elisha. This man thought within himself that his master might as well have taken some of the presents which he had refused; and as he would not have them, he wished to get a share himself, which he supposed Naaman was now in a humour freely to give. But, as his master had refused, what story could he tell if he asked for the money?—why, he invented a lie. Naaman saw him running after him, and got out of his chariot to know the reason. Then he told him that two young sons of the prophets had just arrived, and he had come to ask for a talent of silver and two changes of raiment for them. Naaman would make him take two talents, worth thirty-five hundred dollars, and two changes of garments, and he made his servants carry them for him. When they got to a tower which was at the entrance of Samaria, he stowed the articles away in a house, and sent back the men. Now, he thought that all was snugly done, and that he might buy olive-yards, and vine-yards, and sheep, and oxen, and men-servants, and maid-servants, with the money, and become quite great. But while he was dreaming in this foolish way, and flattered himself that the prophet knew nothing about what he had done, Elisha knew all about it; and when he went, as usual, to wait upon his master, Elisha asked him where he had been? He had told one lie, and, like wicked children who tell one lie, he had now another ready to try and cover the first, and he said, "No where." Why, said Elisha, "went not my heart with thee,"—that is, did I not know, "when the man turned again from his chariot to meet thee?" Is it a time to enrich thyself now, when a heathen has been brought to the knowledge of God, and wouldst thou gain by such an event as that? So he told the wicked man that he should have Naaman's leprosy as a punishment, "and he went out from his presence a leper, as white as snow."





My dear young readers, we are all lepers, like Naaman, but not on our skins; our leprosy is worse, and lies in our hearts. It is the foul disease of sin that infects us. This makes us all as unclean before God as Naaman was before men. Who, then, can cure us? There is "a fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness." What Jordan's waters did for Naaman's leprosy, the precious blood of the Lord Jesus Christ can do for our disease—it can cleanse us from all sin. But we must go, by faith, to the Saviour, we must seek him in prayer, and if we so seek him, not once, but seven times, or many times, if it be seventy times seven, God will take away the stains of sin from our souls, and we shall be made holy and unblameable before him, "not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing."

THE SIXTH CHAPTER OF II. KINGS, (TO VER. 23.)

An axe made to swim by Elisha—The King of Syria's secrets told by Elisha—The Syrian Army smitten with Blindness and led into Samaria by Elisha.

"Then the king of Syria warred against Israel, and took counsel with his servants, saying, In such and such a place shall be my camp. And the man of God sent unto the king of Israel, saying, Beware that thou pass not such a place, for thither the Syrians are come down."—Ver. 8.

Elisha gave so many proofs that he was an extraordinary prophet, that large numbers of the sons of the prophets flocked to him for instruction, so that there was not room for them at Gilgal, where Elisha used to live. The young men, therefore, proposed to go to Jordan, which was about six miles off, and by every one cutting a beam from the trees which grew upon its banks, they thought they could soon build a new house large enough to hold them all. Customs were then different from what they are now with us, and the young prophets knew how to build as well as to study. Elisha approved of the plan, and so they set off, and began to work.





"But as one was felling a beam, the axe-head fell into the water; and he cried and said, Alas, master, for it was borrowed!" Some people do not care about what they borrow, and often never return the things that are lent them, but this is not honest; this good man was quite of a different feeling, and he was grieved to lose the axe which he had borrowed, for he could not repay it. Elisha then asked him to show him the place where the axe was thrown in; and then he cut down a stick and threw it after it, and, lo, the iron swam; and he got his axe again. Now you know that iron will not swim, but sink; but this was a miracle, a thing done contrary to the usual order of things; and it was another proof, added to those before given, that Elisha was a man of God, one on whom he had bestowed extraordinary power.

Elisha's miracles were not yet done. The king of Syria raised an army against Israel, and advised with his counsellors about the best spots for fixing his camp, and making inroads upon the country, so as to plunder it. However, every time he marched to any place, he found that the Israelites were aware of him. This made him suspect his people of treachery. At last, one of them, who had heard of Elisha's exploits, told him that he could easily make it out how Israel happened to know all the king of Syria intended to do, for there was Elisha the prophet in Israel, who could let his king know all that passed, even in the king of Syria's bed-chamber.

The king of Syria then sent a large army to surround Dothan, where Elisha then was, and to take him prisoner. This was very foolish, for if Elisha was not the cause of his plans being found out, it was of no use; and if he was the cause, why then the prophet would as easily know that he intended to capture him, and so get out of his way.

One morning early, Elisha's servant being up, was astonished to find the city surrounded with Syrian soldiers. In his fright he ran to his master, and told him, and cried out, "Alas, my master!" for he thought they would certainly be taken or slain by such a great host. Elisha then prayed to God to open the eyes of the man's understanding, to see how well he was protected; and he saw a host of angels all around, looking like horses and chariots





of fire. The Syrians then descended from a mountain, and approached the city, and Elisha prayed that God would smite them with blindness, or, at least, make their eyes so dim that they would be unable to distinguish any object clearly. God heard Elisha's prayer. Then the prophet went himself to the army, and told them that the prophet was not in the city, which was true, for he had now come out of it—and, if they wanted to know the way to the place where he was to be found, he would lead them there. So he led them to Samaria: and then he prayed again that God would open their eyes, and lo, they were in the midst of the capital of Samaria, surrounded by people and soldiers enough to cut them all to pieces. The king then asked the prophet if he might kill them, but the prophet would not let him, for he had only taken them there to show them how foolish they were: besides, it would have looked very treacherous, after he had promised to lead them; so he got them kindly treated, procured bread and water to refresh them, and then sent them away to their master, glad enough to escape.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER OF II. KINGS, (FROM VER. 24,) AND THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

The Siege of Samaria.

“And it came to pass after this, that Benhadad, king of Syria, gathered all his host, and went up and besieged Samaria.”—
Ver. 24.

The Syrians seem to have had a great enmity to the Israelites. Though they had been shown, not long before, how foolish it was to make war against a people whom God so wonderfully protected by his prophet; and though they had been treated so kindly by Elisha, and the king and people, at Samaria, which ought to have made them friends rather than enemies; we here find them suddenly surrounding Samaria, which had, perhaps, been short of provisions; and so laying siege to it to starve the people to surrender.





As the people of Samaria could not get out of the city to obtain provisions from the fields or other places, the famine was great among them ; they even ate asses, whose flesh was reckoned unclean, and not fit for man's food ; and these creatures becoming scarce, so many having been killed, an ass's head, with the little meat it afforded, was at last sold for a large sum of money. Some think the value of the Jewish pieces given for the ass's head was thirteen dollars, others say thirty dollars, and others say it was as much as fifty dollars. There was also a very poor sort of peas, called fitches, or lentiles, which somewhat resembled dove's dung, and a fourth part of a cab of these, which was about half a pint, was sold for three or four dollars. The cab was a measure holding about a quart.

But there was still a worse proof of the distress of the people for food. The king was passing along the wall of the city, giving his orders for its defence, when a woman implored his help, considering herself as wronged by another woman. The case was this : —they had nothing to eat, and agreed by turns to kill their poor infants and eat them. So this woman killed hers, and it was eaten up ; but when she asked the other woman to kill hers, she refused, and hid it, either wanting to keep it for herself, or shuddering at so cruel and wicked a deed. The king thought at first that the woman wanted food from him, and asked, " Whence shall I help thee ? out of the barn-floor, or out of the wine-press ? " — meaning, that there was no corn in the barns, and no wine in the presses, and so she could have nothing. But when he heard what she had done, he rent his clothes in great agony ; and when they were torn, the people saw that he was dressed underneath in sackcloth, or rough cloth, which was a sign of his distress for his people, and of his humiliation before God.

People may, however, wear signs of humiliation, and not be humble. God looks at the heart, and not at the garb. The king knew that Elisha was God's prophet, and, therefore, he ought to have revered him ; but you will now see how he acted. He, supposing that Elisha had brought all the suffering upon the city, resolved to cut off his head that very day. So he sent a man to execute his terrible threat. Elisha being told in his mind, by a





revelation from God, knew that the man was coming, and told some of the elders who were with him what was intended; he then ordered them to secure the door, and stop till the king himself should come, which he would do; for, said he of the man, "Is not the sound of his master's feet behind him?"—that is, Is not the king also following him?

Then Elisha said, "Behold, this evil is of the Lord; why should I wait for the Lord any longer?"—meaning, as it is thought, that the time of deliverance for Samaria now drew nigh, and therefore he would pray no more for it, but wait to see how God would answer his prayers, which he would do directly.

Then Elisha prophesied, that, on the next day, instead of famine there should be such plenty that a measure of fine flour, holding more than a peck, should be sold for silver worth about fifty-five or sixty cents, and double the quantity of barley for the same money. What a difference, when half a pint of a miserable sort of pea had fetched at least three dollars!

The king heard this prophecy, and a nobleman on whose arm the king leaned would not believe it possible that such good news could be true. "Aye," said he, "if God should open windows in heaven"—meaning, if he should rain down the flour and barley, then we may have it. "Well," said Elisha, "it shall be as I have said; you shall just live long enough to know it, but not to partake of the plenty." See how wicked it is not to believe God's word, for this was not the word of Elisha, but the word of God spoken by Elisha.

Now there happened to be four men who had the leprosy so very bad that they were not allowed to enter into the city; some think these were Gehazi, Elisha's wicked servant, on whom Naaman's leprosy rested, and Gehazi's sons. These lepers were starving, and they said, It is of no use to try to go into the city, for there we shall get no food, and if we stay here we shall die; so let us try if the Syrians will help us, for they have food enough, and if they kill us, why we shall but die at last.

The lepers then went to the camp of the Syrians, and it was in the dusk of the evening; but when they got there, how surprised were they to find that not a man remained! The fact was, that





God had made the Syrians to fancy that they heard the noise of a very large army approaching them; supposing that the king of Israel had got some other kings to help him, and that they were marching suddenly upon them to cut them to pieces, they all fled for their lives, and left every thing they had behind them—tents, horses, asses, food, silver, gold, raiment; and, indeed, a vast treasure. The lepers now ate and drank plentifully, and then began to secure some of the treasure for themselves, and hid it. But they forgot for some time, that, while they were enjoying themselves, their countrymen in Samaria were starving. So they said, "We do not well, we ought to tell the good news to the city, and, if we do not, something bad may happen to us." They did not know but that the Syrians might return and kill them; or the king of Israel would soon find them out, and be angry with them for not telling him what had happened; or God might punish them for delaying to save their brethren. So they hastened to the sentinel who kept guard at the city gates, and the news was soon told to the king.

The king directly got up, and consulted with his courtiers about what he should do. "This," said he, "is only a trick of the Syrians; they are not far off; they have, most likely, hid themselves somewhere in the fields close by, and when we go out they will fall upon us." Some of his counsellors then proposed to send out some horsemen to see if the Syrians were really gone, and their advice was taken. It was proposed to send out five horsemen, but there were only two horses remaining, and those chariot-horses, used for drawing and not for riding; the rest were either in a starving state or eaten. Two horsemen, therefore, set off, and went as far as Jordan, over which the Syrians had to pass, and they found they were gone, and that all the road was strewn with garments and vessels, which, in their flight, they had thrown away, supposing the enemy was at their heels.

The messengers now returned and told the king, "and the people went out and spoiled the tents of the Syrians;"—that is, they took for spoil all that the Syrians had left; and they had left so much food, which they had provided for their men, that "a measure of fine flour was sold for a shekel," or a little more than





half a dollar, "and two measures of barley for a shekel, according to the word of the Lord." So you see God's word came true which he spoke by Elisha.

But what became of the nobleman who would not believe it? Why the king gave him charge of the city gate to keep order, and prevent the rush of the people, eager to get food; and, in doing his duty, the crowd was so great and in so much hurry, that he was pushed down and trampled to death. So he saw the quantities of food brought in by the people, but never tasted any himself, just as Elisha had told him.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER OF II. KINGS.

Benhadad, king of Syria, murdered by his servant Hazael.

"And it came to pass on the morrow, that he took a thick cloth, and dipped it in water, and spread it on his face, so that he died; and Hazael reigned in his stead."—Ver. 15.

When the famine was about to take place in Samaria, the prophet Elisha told the woman of Shunem, who had been so kind to him, that she had better go out of the country into the land of the Philistines, and so escape from the general distress for want of food.

She took his advice, and went, and remained seven years.

When she returned, she found her land in the possession of other persons, who would not give it up, and probably denied that it belonged to her. So she went and cried to the king to help her to get it again.

It happened, just at that moment, that the king was talking with Gehazi, Elisha's old wicked servant, who was smitten with the leprosy, and he was asking him to tell him about some of the miracles which the prophet had done. And he was then speaking of the child which Elisha had restored to life. As soon as Gehazi saw the Shunammite, he recollected her; and so her coming at the moment showed the truth of what Gehazi had been telling the king about the prophet, and gave proof to the king





THE CAPTIVE MAIDEN.



BOAZ AND RUTH.



that this was the very person who owned the house and land which she now wanted again. Some people would say this was very lucky for the Shunammite, but it is more proper to say it was providential—the providence, or care of God over her concerns, so ordered it that she might not be cheated out of what belonged to her. No doubt, as a good woman, she had first prayed to God to help her, and he now heard her prayers.

So the king ordered the house and land to be restored, and all the profit that had been made upon them during the time of her absence.

Elisha, in his journeys, went to Damascus, the chief city of Syria, and at that time Benhadad the king was sick. Like all sick people, he wished much to know if he should get well; and he sent Hazael, his chief captain, to inquire of the prophet. So Hazael went, and took with him a number of presents, according to the custom of the East, which is continued to this day. And he said to the prophet, “Thy son, Benhadad, king of Syria, hath sent me to thee, saying, Shall I recover of this disease?”—not that Benhadad was the prophet’s son, but it was a respectful way of speaking in use, when a prophet was addressed. Elisha told Hazael that his master might recover of his disease, but still he should die. And he looked at Hazael till the officer was ashamed, or stared him out of countenance, as we say, as though he would search his very heart; and then “the man of God wept.”

Hazael asked him why he wept. The prophet then told him that he foresaw he would do a great deal of harm to Israel, and be guilty of very great cruelties in killing men and women, and dashing the little children to pieces, which might be done against the rocks, stones, walls, and pavements; and he meant by this that he would have power in Syria, and would go to war with Israel. Then Hazael answered the prophet, “Is thy servant a dog, that he should do this great thing?” By which some suppose he meant, “Do you suppose I could act so much like a brute?” Though others think, with some reason, that he rather meant, “What! shall such a man as I am, not of royal blood, be raised to power enough to do such things?” “Yes,” said the





prophet; "the Lord hath showed me that thou shalt be king over Syria.

So Hazael went home, and he told the king that the prophet said he would recover: which was not true, for he had only said that he might recover of his disease, and yet he should die; but Hazael said nothing about that.

The next day Hazael took a wet cloth, and laid it on his master's face under the pretence of cooling his fever, and Benhadad, being weak, could not throw it off, and so he was smothered. It is probable that Hazael meant to murder him, though some think he did not mean to kill him, but, according to a custom of the East, tried this means to do him good. It is, however, certain from what afterwards happened, that he was a very cruel, hard-hearted wretch, and was quite capable of murdering his master; of whose throne he got possession after he had killed him.

THE NINTH CHAPTER OF II. KINGS.

Jehu anointed to be King of Israel—Joram and Ahaziah slain—Jezebel killed.

"Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, I have anointed thee king over the people of the Lord, even over Israel.

"And thou shalt smite the house of Ahab thy master, that I may avenge the blood of my servants the prophets, and the blood of all the servants of the Lord, at the hand of Jezebel."—Vers. 6, 7.

At this time, Joram, or Jehoram, the son of Ahab, and brother of Ahaziah, still reigned in Israel; and Jehoram, the son of Jehoshaphat, reigned in Judah. He was thirty-two years old when he began to reign, and reigned eight years in Jerusalem. He married Athaliah, the daughter of wicked Ahab, and was led into the practice of idolatry.

Edom had been obliged to pay taxes to Judah ever since the time of David, a space of one hundred and fifty years; but the people now rebelled, and elected a king of their own.





Joram, the son of Ahab, had now reigned twelve years, and Ahaziah, the son of Jehoram of Judah, reigned in Judah. He began to reign at twenty-two years of age, and reigned only one year; for "he went with Joram, the son of Ahab, to the war against Hazael, king of Syria, in Ramoth-Gilead; and the Syrians wounded Joram:" and Ahaziah went to Jezreel, where he was lying sick, in order to comfort him.

At this time Jehu was commander of the forces of Israel, and God ordered Elisha to send a young prophet to him, and to pour oil on his head, and inform him that God had chosen him to be king over Israel, that he might cut off all the wicked house of Ahab, which, both in Judah and Israel, were now equally guilty of idolatry.

Some of the other captains had seen the young prophet come to Jehu, and wished to know what he wanted. Then Jehu told them; and though they were not good men, and did not like the prophet, yet God turned their hearts towards Jehu, and they spread their garments under him in token of his dignity, and blew their trumpets, and cried, "Jehu is king."

Jehu then ordered that no soldier should enter Jezreel; so that the news might not reach the two kings who were there. Then he took his chariot and went to Jezreel. As he approached with his company, a watchman on the tower spied him out, and Joram sent a horseman to ask what the news was, and whether peace was made. But Jehu told him he had nothing to do with peace or war, but to go behind him, and follow him. As he did not return, a second was sent; and, when he did not return, Joram, accompanied by Ahaziah, each in his chariot, went out to meet Jehu; for they now saw, by his furious driving, who was coming, Jehu being a very rash man.

As soon as Joram saw Jehu he cried out, "Is it peace, Jehu?" Jehu then reproached him with his idolatry, and told him, "No." Joram's heart instantly failed him, and he turned round to escape, and said to Ahaziah, "There is treachery, O Ahaziah!" At that moment Jehu drew a bow, and shot the arrow right through Joram's heart, "and he sunk down in his chariot."





Then Jehu told his captain, Bidkar, to throw Joram's body into the ground which had belonged to Naboth, and which was close by ; for, said he, when I and thou rode in attendance upon his father Ahab, the Lord laid this burden, or passed this sentence upon him—which he did by Elijah the prophet—for his cruel robbery and murder of Naboth to get his vineyard, and now the sentence is executed : " Surely I have seen yesterday the blood of Naboth, and the blood of his sons, saith the Lord ; and I will requite thee in this plat, saith the Lord."

Thus what God threatens against the wicked, comes to pass ; and as surely as he punished the wicked family of wicked Ahab, so will he at last, if not in this life, punish all wicked persons, whether children or men.

When Ahaziah, the king of Judah, saw that his companion was slain, he fled, and Jehu ordered his servants to smite him also in his chariot, which they did, and he fled wounded to a place called Megiddo, and died ; and his servants took him away, and buried him in Jerusalem.

Thus two wicked kings perished, both being of the house or family of Ahab, and walking in his wicked ways of idolatry. Jehu was ordered, as God's executioner, to destroy the whole house of Ahab ; and Ahaziah's mother being of that house, he was one of the corrupt stock, and following bad advice, walked in the same evil courses.

The wicked queen Jezebel, of whom you before read, was still alive. She had lived through three reigns, but now God's sentence against her also must be executed. You remember that she was the wife of Ahab, and that she had urged him on to do many wicked things ; for " there was none like unto Ahab, which did sell himself to work wickedness in the sight of the Lord, whom Jezebel, his wife, stirred up." It was she who set up the worship of Baal ; it was she who slew the Lord's prophets ; it was she who planned the murder of Naboth to get his vineyard ; well, therefore, might Jehu call her " a cursed woman," for the curse of a just God rested upon her head, who had, by her wickedness, been a curse to Israel.

When Jehu was come to Jezreel, Jezebel painted her face, and





dressed herself up, to awe him by her show and dignity. And then she began to provoke him, and asked him if Zimri had peace who had murdered his master. This was just the way to bring God's sentence upon her. Jehu directly asked the servants, who attended her, if they were on his side, and, if so, to throw her out of the window. So wicked a woman could not be a good mistress, and perhaps some of them hated her, and so helped to obey Jehu's order, though their motive was wrong; but others, perhaps, were haters of her idolatry, and were now glad to see her power coming to an end. In a few moments the proud queen was hurled headlong from the window, and her brains were dashed against the wall and the pavement, and her body trampled upon by horses, and afterwards eaten by dogs; nothing remained of her but "the skull, and the feet, and the palms of her hands." Thus was God's sentence executed which he spoke by Elijah, as recorded in the twenty-first chapter of the First Book of Kings, "The dogs shall eat Jezebel, by the wall of Jezreel."

THE TENTH CHAPTER OF II. KINGS.

Ahab's seventy Sons slain.

"So Jehu slew all that remained of the house of Ahab in Jezreel, and all his great men, and his kinsfolks, and his priests, until he left him none remaining."—Ver. 11.

As God had appointed Jehu to destroy all the house of Ahab that were in Israel, he still proceeded with his dreadful work. Ahab had seventy sons and grandsons, for they are often called by the same name. These were in Samaria, a strong city, and under the care of guardians who might there have defended them. Jehu, therefore, wrote to them to prepare one of the sons for king of Israel, if they chose to contend with him, but told them they must fight for it. They were, however, all afraid; God had put fear in their hearts, and they sent Jehu word that they would serve him. Jehu then demanded, as a proof of their loyalty, that they would





destroy all the sons of Ahab under their care. This seemed a dreadful sentence ; but as they were doubtless all idolaters, trained up in the wickedness of their father and grandfather, and might have yet disturbed Israel by claiming the throne, and again have made Israel to sin by idolatry—they must also be cut off.

See what a dreadful thing it is to be the wicked children of wicked parents. Thank God if you are not so, and if you and your parents both fear God and serve him ; for, “ Who shall harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good ? ”

So the seventy sons of Ahab were slain ; and their heads were cut off, and put in baskets, and sent to Jehu, to show they were really dead.

After this Jehu destroyed every portion of Ahab's house that he found in Israel ; and all Ahab's priests of Baal.

Ahaziah's house also, being related to Ahab, and having fallen into his sin, were likewise destroyed, and God threw them remarkably into the way of Jehu ; for, as he was riding about, he met a body of forty-two distinguished persons whom he did not know, and he inquired who they were ; they, not knowing what had happened, said that they were relations of Ahaziah, the friend of Joram, and were going to pay their respects to the family of the king and queen—the wicked Jezebel. Jehu then directly seized them, and had them slain, and so these idolaters were also cut off ! Surely “ it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God ! ” He is good, and kind, and forbearing towards all men ; but obstinate sinners must at last perish ; sometimes in this world, but certainly in the next ; and dreadful will be their end, who live and die in breaking his laws.

God approved of all that Jehu had done, for he had been the executioner of a vile race of idolaters ; but still he kept the golden calves which Jeroboam had set up, supposing them a good thing to prevent the Israelites from going into Judah to worship God in his temple there. God therefore punished Jehu, and the people of Israel, by allowing their enemies to encroach upon their borders, and to cut their inhabitants to pieces, and so “ in those days the Lord began to cut Israel short.” God, however, promised to reward Jehu for the good he had done in destroying idolatry, and





that his children and great great grandchildren, called here the fourth generation, should, for these services rendered to him, sit upon the throne of Israel. God never forgets to reward those who serve him; and if he rewarded Jehu, who, in doing these things, was forwarding his own ambition, how much more will he reward the "works of faith, and labours of love," performed by those who trust in his mercy, and *delight* in his service!

Jehu reigned twenty-eight years; was buried in Samaria, and succeeded by his son, Jehoahaz.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER OF II. KINGS.

Usurpation and Death of Athaliah.

"And when Athaliah, the mother of Ahaziah, saw that her son was dead, she arose and destroyed all the seed royal."—
Ver. 1.

We now, for a while, leave the affairs of Israel, to see what was done in Judah on the death of Ahaziah.

Athaliah, the mother of Ahaziah, was a sister of wicked Ahab, and possessed the same wicked spirit. As soon as she heard that her son was slain, she cruelly killed Ahaziah's young children, who, of course, were her grandchildren; one only escaped. Joash was then a little infant, and was cast away to die among the slain; but Jehosheba, the wife of the high-priest, and a sister of Ahaziah, and therefore aunt to the infant, took him up and ran away with him secretly, and hid him in one of the priest's chambers.

For six years the cruel Athaliah reigned, but when the young prince was seven years old, the priest showed him to the elders of the people; bound them by a sacred oath to secrecy: set guards to the temple, and solemnly crowned him. The people, tired of the reign of such a base creature, were delighted at seeing the young Joash, clapped their hands, and shouted, "God save the king!" Athaliah, hearing the noise, went to see what was the matter, and when she found Joash made king, she cried out, "Treason, treason!" but nobody would help her; and, if any had





dared to do so, Jehoiada gave orders to have them slain. So they thrust her away from the temple, and slew her. Thus God caused the punishment of a cruel murderer and usurper. "Verily, there is a God that judgeth in the earth."

Having restored the rightful family to the throne, the high-priest made the people swear to be faithful to the service of the true God, and then destroyed the temple and altars of Baal, and slew the wicked priest of Baal, who had deluded the people, by pretending that an idol was God. So the people were now peaceable and happy.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER OF II. KINGS.

The Reign of Joash, King of Judah.

"And his servants arose, and made a conspiracy, and slew Joash in the house of Millo, which goeth down to Sella."—Ver. 20.

Joash, or Jehoash, began to reign over Judah in the seventh year of the reign of Jehu over Israel, Jehu having begun his reign when Joash was an infant. Though Ahaziah was his father, his mother was not Athaliah, so that he was not of the wicked house of Ahab, for "his mother's name was Zibiah, of Beer-sheba, a city in the tribe of Simeon."

While Jehoiada, the high-priest, was his instructor, Joash did what was right. The people, however, though they worshipped Jehovah, still kept their high places in imitation of the heathen; and, as these had now been long established, they became attached to old customs, and found it more convenient to worship God there than in his temple; but in so doing, they were disobeying God's command, and, therefore, could expect no blessing.

The house of the Lord had now been much neglected, and was out of repair, and Joash adopted means to save money for it, and had it well repaired.

Joash, however, afterwards disgraced himself by his cowardly conduct towards Hazael, king of Syria, of whom we have read; for Hazael, having taken Gath, and being upon his march towards





JOASH. THE CHILD KING.



ELISHA ON HIS DEATH-BED.



Jerusalem, Joash, instead of boldly opposing him, and trusting to the protection of God, gave him all the treasures of the temple to induce him to go back. Joash, having declined in his zeal for God's glory, lost the protection of God, and, at last, his servants conspired against him and slew him, after having reigned forty years, and his son Amaziah reigned in his stead.

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER OF II. KINGS.

The Reigns of Jehoahaz, and Joash, Kings of Israel—The Death of the Prophet Elisha—The dead Man raised to Life in his Sepulchre.

“Now Elisha was fallen sick of his sickness whereof he died. And Joash, the king of Israel, came down unto him, and wept over his face, and said, O my father, my father, the chariots of Israel and the horsemen thereof.”—Ver. 14.

Joash had reigned twenty-three years over Judah when Jehoahaz succeeded his father Jehu as king of Israel. The length of his reign was seventeen years. During that time he encouraged the people in worshipping their two idol-calves. So God was angry with them, or acted as we should do when angry, that is, gave them up to be punished for their crime; and Hazael, and his son and successor Benhadad, kings of Syria, overcame many of them, and used them very cruelly.

Then Jehoahaz prayed to God to help the people; and God, who is very merciful, when he was called upon, delivered them from their enemies; and they lived in their tents in safety, as they formerly used to do.

Yet these foolish people soon again returned to the worship of their calves.

The army of Israel was now in a very low state; for the Syrians had reduced it to fifty horsemen, and ten chariots, and ten thousand footmen, or foot-soldiers; these would have been nothing to





protect the country, had not God, in spite of the people's idolatry still guarded it by his providence, and saved it from entire ruin.

On the death of Jehoahaz, Jehoash, or Joash, his son, came to the throne ; and now there were two kings of that name reigning ; for Joash, king of Judah, was yet living, and in the thirty-seventh year of his reign. This Joash, king of Israel, reigned sixteen years, and so lived in the reign of Amaziah, who, we said at the close of the last chapter, succeeded his father Joash as king of Judah. Nothing good is said of this Joash, king of Israel, but we learn that he " followed the sins of Jeroboam," still sanctioned the golden calves, and that he fought against his neighbour Amaziah, king of Judah, and beat him, of which we have an account in the next chapter. This king of Israel reigned sixteen years, and his son, who was called Jeroboam, " sat upon his throne."

Before closing the history of the reign of this Joash of Israel, we find that in his time the prophet Elisha died. The king valued him as a good man and a prophet ; for ministers, if they are good men, are often valued by bad men. And the king went to see him, and grieved to think he was about to die ; for, now Israel was so weak, he would have been like chariots and horsemen to protect it by his prayers and advice. And the king " wept over his face, and said, O my father, my father, the chariots of Israel, and the horsemen thereof."

Elisha the prophet, being taught by God about what would happen for Israel, now encouraged Joash before he died. And he told him to open the window eastward, and shoot with an arrow. Joash did so, and he told him that was a sign that the Syrians, who ruled to the eastward of Israel, should be conquered by him. Then he told him to thrust his arrows into the ground, and Joash did so three times. The prophet was then angry with him, for he told him this was done by way of a sign, and had he shown greater earnestness, and thrust his arrows six times into the ground, he should quite have overcome the Syrians.

Elisha died, and was buried in a sepulchre, and here is a remarkable story mentioned of what happened after he was buried .

Some Israelites were carrying a dead body to a grave in the





usual burial-place, when they saw a party of Moabites coming, who were marching about for plunder; and the Israelites fearing lest they should fall into their hands, let down the body into the tomb which was nearest to them, instead of proceeding further. This happened to be the sepulchre of Elisha, and as soon as the body touched that of the prophet, the dead man came to life, and stood upon his feet! It was not, indeed, Elisha's body that made him come to life, but the power of God, who thus honoured the bones of his prophet, and encouraged Joash to believe that what such a man had told him would surely come to pass, for he was the servant of God.

Joash found Elisha's words true; for God had compassion on Israel, and delivered them from their oppressors, the Syrians; and Joash beat them three times, and recovered all the cities of Israel which had been taken from them.

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER OF II. KINGS.

The Reign of Amaziah, King of Judah—The Reign of Jeroboam, the Son of Joash, King of Israel.

“Now they made a conspiracy against him in Jerusalem, and he fled to Lachish; but they sent after him to Lachish, and slew him there.

“And they brought him on horses; and he was buried at Jerusalem, with his fathers, in the city of David.”—Vers. 19, 20.

I told you that Amaziah succeeded his father Joash, king of Judah, who was murdered by his servants. In this place you will have some account of his reign. He began to reign in Judah, in the second year of the reign of Joash, king of Israel. He was then twenty-five years old, and “reigned twenty-nine years in Jerusalem.” This king kept up the worship of God, but still allowed the people to burn incense on the high places, which God had forbidden. He did not let the murderers of his father escape, though they were, most likely, great and powerful men in the kingdom





He recovered the Edomites, who had long revolted from their subjection to Judah, and slew ten thousand of them in battle.

Amaziah, however, grew haughty, and, for no cause of offence, sent word to Joash, king of Israel, that he would fight with his army.

Joash, to mortify him, answered him by a kind of parable, and sent him this message : "The thistle that was in Lebanon sent to the cedar that was in Lebanon, saying, Give thy daughter to my son to wife ; and there passed by a wild beast that was in Lebanon, and trode down the thistle." He told him also that pride had lifted him up, and that he had better be quiet, both for the sake of himself and his people. By the thistle he meant Amaziah, and by the cedar, himself ; the thistle being a mean, troublesome, and contemptible shrub, and the cedar a stately and strong majestic tree. And by the thistle asking leave to marry the cedar's daughter, he meant to say, that, even if he had wanted that, he should have looked upon him with contempt ; but when he talked of fighting with him, he must take the consequence, for he should tread him down as the wild beast would the thistle.

Amaziah was only provoked by this answer ; and, to humble his pride, God allowed him to go to battle, when Joash defeated him, took him prisoner, marched into Jerusalem by a breach in the wall, and carried off its treasures, and hostages, or persons of rank, as a security for better behaviour in future.

Thus was Amaziah humbled ; and so, some time or other, will all the proud be abased.

Amaziah lived fifteen years after Joash, king of Israel, had died. Like his father, he then perished from a conspiracy of his subjects. To escape them he fled from his chief city, Jerusalem, into Lachish, a fortified city in the tribe of Judah ; but they followed him there, and slew him : afterwards, they took his body to Jerusalem, to bury him with the rest of their kings. The people then declared his son Azariah king, who was then sixteen years old.

Amaziah had reigned nearly fifteen years when Joash, the king of Israel, who defeated him, died ; and was succeeded by his son, Jeroboam, as before stated.





Jeroboam reigned in Samaria, the capital of Israel, forty-one years. He also did evil in the sight of the Lord, like his forefathers; he was, however, of some use to Israel; for notwithstanding their sinfulness, God, who, is rich in mercy, still determined to spare the nation, and he gave Jeroboam victories over the Syrians, and other nations, their enemies; and so their coasts, or borders, were restored which had been taken away from them.

Jeroboam was succeeded by his son, Zachariah.

THE FIFTEENTH CHAPTER OF II. KINGS.

The Reigns of Azariah, King of Judah, Zachariah, Shallum—who reigned a month only—Menahem, Pekahiah, and Pekah, Kings of Israel, and of Jotham, King of Judah.

“In the days of Pekah, king of Israel, came Tiglath-pileser, king of Assyria, and took Ijon, and Abel-beth-maachah, and Janoah, and Kedesh, and Hazor, and Gilead, and Galilee, all the land of Naphtali, and carried them captive to Assyria.”—Ver. 29.

This chapter gives a very short account of several kings of Judah and Israel.

In the last chapter we learned that Azariah succeeded his father Amaziah as king of Judah; and that he became king at sixteen years of age. His reign was long, for he governed Judah fifty-two years. Azariah did some good, like his father, but he displeased God; and as God then showed his displeasure by frequently punishing the ungodly even in this life, he smote this king with a leprosy which he had till the day of his death. As he was unfit to mix with his court as a king, he was shut up in a lone house, and his son Jotham managed the affairs of his kingdom. On his death, Jotham succeeded him.

In Israel there were several kings, during the long reign of Azariah over Judah.

Zachariah, the son of Jeroboam, reigned over Israel only six months; he displeased God by doing evil, and so he gave him up,





unprotected, to the attacks of traitors. It is a shocking thing to want the kind protection of God. Shallum, who is thought to have been a pretended friend of the king's, conspired against him, and publicly slew him before all the people. Bad men are usually despised by all, even by those who are as bad as themselves; at least they have no real love for one another. This was the last king of the family of Jehu, and God's word came true by the prophet, that his children should reign to the fourth generation.

Shallum only reigned a month, so he got no good by his treachery. He was killed by Menahem, as he had killed Zachariah.

Menahem was a cruel man, for he then becoming king, went and killed all the people that would not submit to him, and even barbarously slaughtered women and infants. He reigned ten years, and encouraged the worship of the calves. In his reign, Pul, the king of Assyria, marched against Israel; but Menahem taxed the people, and raised a sum of money to give him as a bribe to keep away, that he might be secured on his throne.

Pekahiah, his son, succeeded him, and Azariah was then still reigning in Judah. Pekahiah reigned two years over Israel. He also allowed the people to worship the calves; and a captain of his, named Pekah, formed a plot against him, and slew him, and reigned in his stead.

Pekah reigned twenty years, which was a long reign for one who had got the throne by violence. He also was as bad as the kings of Israel before him. During his reign, as the people still continued to displease God, and their wicked kings did not reprove them, God gave them up to be punished by their foreign enemies; and Tiglath-pileser, king of Assyria, conquered ever so much of the land, and carried away half of the ten tribes of Israel into captivity, or made prisoners of them. This king, though he reigned long, was slain at last in a conspiracy, as he had slain his predecessor; and Hoshea, who slew him, reigned in his stead.

Azariah, the leprous king of Judah, who reigned so long, was now dead, and Jotham, his son, who had managed his affairs during his confinement, was seated on the throne as his father's lawful successor. He began his reign in Judah when Pekah had been reigning nearly two years in Israel. He came to the crown





when he was twenty-five, and "he reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem." He did many things that were good; but still suffered the high places to remain, where incense was burned, which God abhorred. You may observe that his father Azariah is here called Uzziah, which was another name by which he was sometimes called. There was more good in Jotham than in the other kings, and he took an interest in God's worship, and "built the higher gate of the house of the Lord."

The sins of the people, however, still greatly displeased God, and "in those days the Lord began to send against Judah Rezin, the king of Syria, and Pekah, the son of Remaliah." These kings went of their own accord; and yet the Lord is said to have sent them, for they could not have hurt Judah, if God had not allowed them. Thus Israel and Judah were both punished for their sins. God hates sin, and will, sooner or later, always punish it. O let this make us afraid to disobey his commands; and, as we have before done so, let us thank God for Jesus Christ our Saviour, and entreat him to pardon our sins, and not to destroy us for ever, for his sake!

THE SIXTEENTH CHAPTER OF II. KINGS.

The Reign of Ahaz, King of Judah.

"But he walked in the way of the kings of Israel, yea, and made his son to pass through the fire, according to the abominations of the heathen, whom the Lord cast out from before the children of Israel.

"And he sacrificed and burned incense in the high places, and on the hills, and under every green tree."—Vers. 3, 4.

When Jotham died, his son and successor Ahaz began his reign in Judah, while Pekah still reigned in Israel.

Ahaz was a dreadful idolater. He began to reign when he was twenty years old and "reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem;" so that he must have done much harm to his people during that time, by setting them so wicked an example. He even "made his son





to pass through the fire," a cruel ceremony performed in honour of Moloch, an idol-god of the Ammonites, and as a proof that he devoted his son to his false religion. A writer, who wrote some hundreds of years ago, says that he had seen in his time, in some cities, piles kindled once a year, over which not only boys but men would leap, and infants were carried by their mothers through the flames; which seemed to be done to obtain pardon for sin, and to purify the soul; and he thinks that this was like the custom here practised by the wicked Ahaz.

Children cannot be too thankful to God, who do not live among wicked and cruel idolaters, but under the influence of the mild and merciful religion of Jesus Christ, the friend and Saviour even of "little children." For, there are millions of idolaters still, in other parts of the world, who submit their children to the greatest cruelties, to please, as they suppose, their false gods.

To punish this wicked king, God sent, or allowed, Rezin, the king of Syria, and Pekah, the king of Israel, to make war with him. They even got to Jerusalem, and besieged Ahaz in his capital. They did not, however, succeed in taking it, and dethroning him; but Rezin took Elath, a sea-port on the Red Sea, that formerly belonged to Edom, but was now in the possession of Judah.

To get completely rid of these attacks, Ahaz sent to Tiglath-pileser, the king of Assyria, who was the enemy of Israel, and had carried off half the people as prisoners, and he offered to become his servant, or to be subject to him by paying him rich presents, if he would but take his part. So he now agreed to give him the silver and gold of the Lord's house, and of his own royal house, if he would protect him.

Tiglath-pileser was very well pleased at the terms, and marched against Damascus, the capital of Syria, and took the people away into slavery and killed Rezin, who had probably hastened back to save his own city, instead of taking that of Ahaz. It was, however, a wicked thing of Ahaz to submit himself to a wicked king, and he might have obtained deliverance without his help, had he sought help from God. But now he was an idolater himself, he looked, in time of need, to another idolater; and, on hard and





humbling terms, he obtained his protection; for he lost all his silver and gold, and made himself so weak in power for want of money, that he was now little better than his slave. The service of sin is always a hard service: it would have cost him neither wealth nor liberty, had his trust been in the Lord God of his father David.

“ Evil communications corrupt good manners.” By connecting himself with the king of Assyria, Ahaz plunged more into idolatry. He paid that king a visit at Damascus, and there he saw a heathen altar that he liked, and ordered one to be made like it directly, and to be set up in the house of the Lord at Jerusalem. And he displaced God’s altar, and offered sacrifices upon the heathen altar; and he almost broke in pieces the beautiful brazen sea, which was supported by brass oxen, and took away the oxen, and laid the great laver on the floor; and he removed the splendid covering from the king’s house to the temple, to show how little he cared about it; and it seems to have been given to the king of Assyria for his use.

Ahaz was cut off by death in the midst of his days, in the thirty-sixth year of his age, and his son, Hezekiah, reigned in his stead.

THE SEVENTEENTH CHAPTER OF II. KINGS.

Hoshea the last King of Israel—The tribes of Israel carried away into Captivity.

“ For the children of Israel walked in all the sins of Jeroboam which he did; they departed not from them, until the Lord removed Israel out of his sight, as he had said by all his servants the prophets.

“ So was Israel carried away out of their own land to Assyria unto this day.”—Vers. 22, 23.

Pekah, king of Israel, was slain by Hoshea, during the reign of Ahaz in Judah.

This Hoshea reigned nine years over Israel. He was not so bad





as other kings of Israel, but he was not a pious king, and any thing short of true piety is displeasing to God. Israel had now run great lengths in wickedness, and if he did not urge them on as others had done before him, he did not restrain them from sin. and so God now punished the nation severely for their sins. He is long-suffering, but when sinners do not repent, his wrath at length falls upon them, and then he is "a consuming fire."

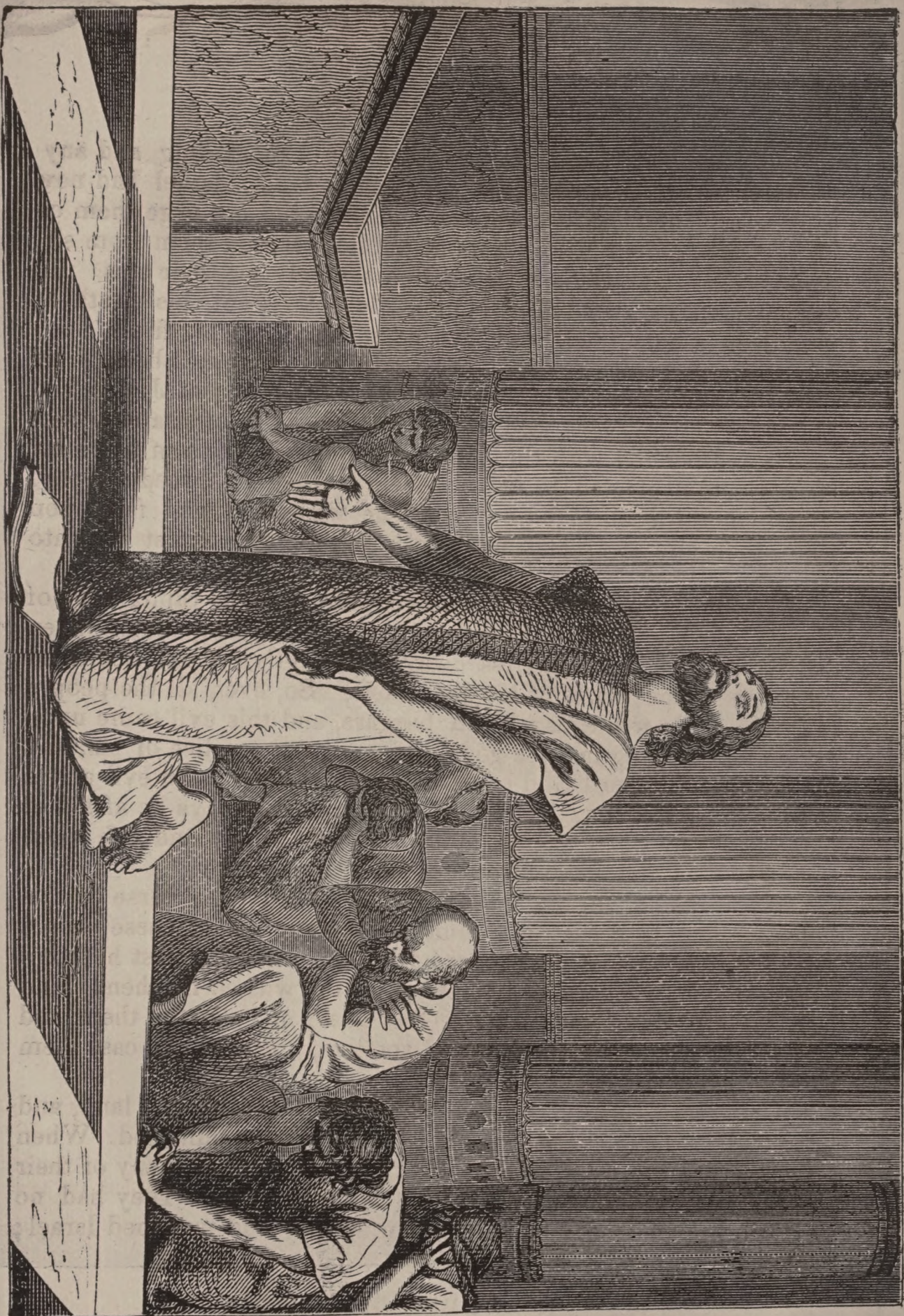
Shalmanezar was now king of Assyria, "and Hoshea became his servant and gave him presents," just as the king of Judah had done. He, however, tried to shake off the yoke of Shalmanezar, and corresponded with the king of Egypt to invite him to be his friend, and neglected to pay to Assyria what he agreed to pay. Shalmanezar soon found out what he was doing, and fell upon him, took him away and put him in fetters, and thrust him into prison.

The king of Assyria then besieged Samaria, the capital city of Israel, which held out three years against him; and, having taken it, he carried the Israelites away into captivity, and scattered them in various parts of his dominions. So, even all the people of rank were made slaves and beggars, and this evil came upon them for trusting in false gods, living in the practice of sin, and neglecting the Lord God of Israel. Surely "it is an evil and a bitter thing to sin against God." Oh! let us always be afraid of sin; it is our worst enemy. We are most happy and safe when we fear God and keep his commandments.

If you read from the seventh to the twenty-third verse of this chapter, you will see an account of the offences of these people against God, and how they hardened their hearts against his commandments, and followed the ways of the wicked heathen. And so "the Lord rejected all the seed of Israel, and afflicted them, and delivered them into the hand of spoilers, until he had cast them out of his sight."

They were, however, a wicked people who took the land, and for their wickedness God did not let them go unpunished. When they took away the Israelites, they gave the land to many of their own country, and so it was filled with heathen. They had no enemies upon them to punish them as they had punished Israel;





HEZEKIAH'S PRAYER.



THE BURIAL OF AMAZIAH.



but still God was at no loss for means to punish them; he sent lions among them, and these destroyed so many people that messengers were sent to the king of Assyria to ask of him what should be done. The heathen inhabitants had an idea that the God of this land was a God that did not rule any where else, and they thought it would be as well to learn the way to worship him. The king of Assyria thought the same, and so he sent them a priest of Israel, who went and lived at Bethel, and told them how to fear God. However, the people of different countries, who were now sent to people the land of Israel, all worshipped different gods of their own making, as well as joined in the outward worship of the true God.

Thus were the ten tribes of Israel scattered and lost on account of their sins, and they have never been recovered to this day; and thus their land became a habitation for idolaters.

THE EIGHTEENTH AND NINETEENTH CHAPTERS OF II. KINGS.

The good Hezekiah King of Judah—Sennacherib's Army destroyed.

“He trusted in the Lord God of Israel, so that, after him, was none like him among all the kings of Judah, nor any that were before him.”—Chap. xviii. ver. 5.

At the time that Israel were carried away into captivity by the Assyrians, Hezekiah, the son of Ahaz, was king of Judah. He ascended the throne in the third year of the reign of Hoshea over Israel, at the age of twenty-five, and reigned in Jerusalem, over Judah, twenty-nine years.

God was pleased with this king, for “he did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, according to all that David his father did.” “He removed the high places, and brake the images, and cut down the groves,” all of which were devoted to idolatry; and, among the rest, he “brake in pieces,” or ground to powder, “the brazen serpent that Moses had made; for, unto those days, the children of Israel did burn incense to it;” and he called it “Nehushtan;”—which means, *brass*, a mere piece of brass, which





it is the greatest folly to worship. Thus did this good king show his zeal for God, and destroy the idolatrous practices which had so long disgraced Judah. "And the Lord was with him, and he prospered whithersoever he went forth,"— "he rebelled" and threw off the yoke of Assyria, which his father had submitted to, when he said to Tiglath-pileser, "I am thy servant;" and "he smote the Philistines," who in his father's time had marched into Judah, and taken many places in it.

However, in order to try Hezekiah's trust in God, and to punish his wicked subjects, God suffered the king of Assyria, who had destroyed Israel, to march a large force against him, and he took his "fenced cities," or what we call the frontier towns or garrisons, on the borders of the country.

Hezekiah was frightened; and he sent to tell the king of Assyria that he was sorry for having given him offence, and entreated him to go back, and he would give him any thing, for so doing, that he might desire. So he demanded a sum of money worth about two hundred thousand pounds. This obliged Hezekiah to empty the public treasures, and to take all the gold and silver of the temple, even to the ornaments of the posts and the doors. Hezekiah was not right in paying all this money, for there was a prophet then in Judah, and had he gone to him, he would have learnt that God could deliver him without this sacrifice. But, as I have told you, he was frightened; and, although he was a good king, he did what was wrong.

Notwithstanding that Hezekiah had paid the king of Assyria to go back, yet, when he had got the money, he probably thought to himself, 'Now Hezekiah's kingdom is surely mine. He has no money to pay an army, and, if he was so weak before as to be frightened, he must be more so now I have got his treasures.' So this base cheating king, instead of withdrawing his army, as he had agreed to do, sent three generals, with a large host, against Jerusalem, and kept the money too, which was paid him to go back.

One of these generals, called Rab-shakeh, approached the walls, and made a very boasting speech about what he could do, and what Judah could not do, and tried to persuade the soldiers of Judah to desert, or he would reduce them to a horrible state of





starvation. And then he praised his mean tyrant of a king, and told them how generous he would be. And he said they had not got two thousand men in all their army that could ride a horse in battle, or if they could show them, he would give them the horses. And he argued that it was of no use to look for help to Egypt, as Israel had done; and, indeed, he could conquer any nation he pleased, and none of the gods could deliver them out of his hand; and, especially, as Hezekiah had been pulling down the high places, and altars, where could he look for help?

This was like a wicked heathen, who knew nothing of the Lord God of Israel, but he was soon to know that he was very different from the false gods which the king of Assyria had defied.

Hezekiah now found it was in vain to treat with such a tyrant, and he did what he ought to have done before—he rent his clothes, and put on sackcloth as a sign of humiliation, and he went to pray in the house of the Lord. He also sent messengers to Isaiah, the prophet, who then lived in Judah, and entreated him to pray that God would direct and protect him, for he knew not what to do.

God spoke to the prophet's mind, and he told Hezekiah not to fear, for the wicked king who had despised the name of God, should be suddenly and totally subdued by his almighty power.

As Hezekiah did not send any message to the king of Assyria, he received another insolent message from him. And he told him, "Let not thy God, in whom thou trustest, deceive thee, saying, Jerusalem shall not be delivered into the hand of the king of Assyria. Behold, thou hast heard what the kings of Assyria have done to all lands, by destroying them utterly; and shalt thou be delivered?"

When Hezekiah received his letter, he went and spread its contents before the Lord. God knew what it contained, but this was a sign that he wished to have God's direction. And Hezekiah prayed to the God of Israel, the God of all the kingdoms of the world, and he said, "Lord, bow down thine ear, and hear; open, Lord, thine eyes, and see; and hear the words of Sennacherib, which hath sent him to reproach the living God. Of a truth, Lord, the kings of Assyria have destroyed the nations and their lands, and have cast their gods into the fire; for they were no gods, but the work of men's hands, wood and stone: therefore they





have destroyed them. Now, therefore, O Lord our God, I beseech thee, save thou us out of his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that thou art the Lord God, even thou only."

God heard Hezekiah's prayer, and he received an answer by his prophet, Isaiah. In this answer, God said, that, if he touched his virgin—meaning his pure church of Judah, which was now freed from idolatry—and if he thought to cut down its noble forests, and turn the channels of its rivers, in making war upon it, he was mistaken. For he, by his almighty power, would treat him as men treat an obstinate beast, and he would as completely restrain him as if he were to put a hook into his nose, and a bridle into his lips, and make him go back the way that he came. And God would feed the people as well as deliver them; for, if the army of the Assyrians had destroyed the fruits of the earth, he would soon make them grow again, so that they needed not to fear on that account.

And now, the very night after the blasphemous message had been sent from the king of Assyria, "the angel of the Lord went out, and smote, in the camp of the Assyrians, an hundred four score and five thousand," or an hundred and eighty-five thousand; "and when they arose early in the morning, behold, they were all dead corpses!" Hezekiah would have been afraid to fight such an army, but God fought for him. "The angel of the Lord" is said to have done this, and God, perhaps employed a glorious spirit in this work, but any thing that does his purpose is his angel or messenger. The Scripture does not say what kind of a death this army suffered; some think that they died by a plague, for there are plagues that carry people off in much less time than an hour. The plague, the cholera, and the yellow fever destroy many thousands in a short time when they prevail. Some say that they were killed by lightning; and others suppose, with great probability, that it was by a hot wind, which blows in those parts, and comes upon travellers like a blast of air from the mouth of a hot oven, and so takes away their breath in a moment. Many thousands at a time have perished in this way, while travelling in company in the parts where Judah was situated.





However, while we may be innocently curious to find out in what way Sennacherib the king of Assyria was vanquished, the word of God came to pass, and he escaped among the few that remained alive, and returned whence he came. This ought to have convinced him that the God of Israel was the true God, but he returned to his wicked idolatry, and, "while he was worshipping in the house of Nisroch, his god," two of his sons "smote him with the sword," and "Esar-haddon, his son, reigned in his stead." The Jews say that the reason why his two sons slew him was because he was going to sacrifice them to his god; he was, indeed, idolater enough, and tyrant enough, to do so, but of this we have no account in the Scriptures.

Thus, in Sennacherib you see how God can cast down the proud; and in Hezekiah, how he can raise up the humble.

THE TWENTIETH CHAPTER OF II. KINGS.

Hezekiah's severe Sickness and wonderful Recovery.

"In those days was Hezekiah sick unto death: and the prophet Isaiah, the son of Amoz, came to him, and said unto him, Thus saith the Lord, set thine house in order, for thou shalt die and not live."—Ver. 1.

Good king Hezekiah was taken very ill, and had a bad boil, and the prophet Isaiah went to him, and told him to prepare to die. He was then but a young man, and was aiming to improve the condition of his country, and, no doubt, felt much pained to leave it, before he could do more in the service of God. When, therefore, he heard he was to die, he wept, and he earnestly begged of God to lengthen his life. God immediately heard his earnest prayer, and the prophet went back to tell him that God would add fifteen more years to his life. He was the only man who ever knew exactly how long he should live; and, most likely, he improved the remainder of his days, by still more diligently serving God; though, in one instance, he gave way to pride, and did not render to God, who had made him what he was, all the honour





and glory which was due to his name. This instance I shall soon mention. Isaiah now told the king, that although God would spare his life, he must use means to cure his disorder: so the prophet told him to take a lump of figs, and to apply it to his boil, and by this remedy he would cure it.

At this time, the king of Babylon, a heathen, wished to make a friend of Hezekiah, and sent messengers to him with letters of friendship and a present. Hezekiah received them very kindly, but foolishly and vainly displayed all his treasures, and showed them how rich he was, that they might report it to their master.

Then Isaiah visited the king, and told him, that all his treasures should, by and by, go to the king of Babylon; and his children, of another generation, should be made slaves in his palace. This was to humble Hezekiah's pride, and if his children had been humbled too, the king of Babylon would not have overcome them; but they were as proud as their father of their treasures, without his pious disposition to humble them as he was humbled, and so the king of Babylon, knowing how rich they were, went to war with them, and conquered them, as you will hereafter learn.

THE TWENTY-FIRST CHAPTER OF II. KINGS.

Manasseh's exceedingly wicked Reign in Judah—Amon's wicked Reign in Judah.

“And he did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord, after the abominations of the heathen, whom the Lord cast out before the children of Israel.”—Ver. 2.

On the death of Hezekiah, his son, Manasseh, reigned in his stead. Though he had so good a father, who abolished idolatry, and loved and served God, he himself was very wicked. We may suppose that he fell into the hands of bad counsellors, for he was but twelve years old when he began to reign; yet he seemed to love evil with all his heart. He rebuilt the high places which his





father had destroyed, reared altars to Baal, made a grove for impure ceremonies, worshipped the hosts of heaven, profaned the house of the Lord by heathen worship, made his son pass through the fire, used enchantments or conjurations, and dealt with wizards and other conjurors.

The people were as wicked as their king, and therefore God threatened to punish Jerusalem, as he did the city of Samaria, and the house of Ahab, and completely to clean it out, as if a dish were wiped, and to upset the state, like a dish turned upside down. Judah should be led into captivity, like Israel, for now their crimes had become exceedingly great; they and their king were notorious idolaters, and to carry their measures, they had "shed innocent blood very much;" most likely, all the good men who had opposed these iniquities were put to death, and, among others, it is believed that Manasseh killed the prophet Isaiah, and had him sawn asunder for telling him the truth.

After a reign of fifty-five years, Manasseh died. In this book we hear no more about him; but I am happy to tell you, that in the next book, the First Book of Chronicles, we shall learn, that he was a penitent, and that God had mercy upon him, O! what great sinners God can save! May we all be penitents! for if we have not sinned in the same way as Manasseh, yet, in God's sight, we are all great sinners, and need his forgiveness. If we repent and look for pardon through the kind interference of Jesus Christ, who, on that account, is called our Mediator, we shall, with Manasseh, find mercy.

Manasseh was buried in the garden of his house, and not in the sepulchres of the kings, and his son Amon succeeded him.

Amon began to reign when he was twenty-two years old, and he reigned only two years. The king was wicked like his father, but he did not repent like him. He was killed by a conspiracy of his servants. We cannot wonder that among the people whom he and his father had made so wicked, there should be some ready to do so wicked an act. They were, indeed, executed for their crime; but this was but a small show of good amidst so much evil.





THE TWENTY-SECOND AND TWENTY-THIRD CHAPTERS OF II. KINGS.

Josiah, the most excellent King of Judah.

“And like unto him was there no king before him, that turned to the Lord with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his might, according to all the law of Moses ; neither after him arose there any like him.”—Chap. xxiii. 25.

Josiah was the next king ; he was Amon's son.

This prince came to the crown at eight years of age, and he reigned thirty-one years.

He turned out to be a most pious youth. He loved and served God very early, and he did so all the days of his life. What an honourable character ! May many be induced to imitate it ! for to be truly pious is the only way to be truly happy.

This good young king repaired the house of the Lord, which had been suffered to go to decay. And Hilkiah, the high priest, having found the book of the law, which had long been neglected, the king had it read to him, and was much grieved to find how the people had broken it, and to what dreadful punishments they were exposed for their wickedness. Then he sent to be instructed about God's will, from a holy prophetess whose name was Huldah, and she foretold what evil was about to come upon Jerusalem for its sins : but because Josiah's heart was tender, and he had humbled himself before God, he should die in peace, and should never see the evil that was threatened.

Then the king, knowing the threatenings of God, tried to bring the people over to repentance for their sins. And he gathered together the elders, and the priests, and the prophets, and a very large number of the people, and went up to the house of the Lord. Before this assembly, he stood like a minister and servant of God, and read the book of the law. Here the king and the people made a covenant or agreement to serve God, and they knew that his word promised that he would be their God to love them, and to do them good, if they would be his faithful people.

Then the king began to show how much he was in earnest, and





took away all the temptations to idolatry. Every vessel that had been used for the serving of false gods was taken out of Jerusalem, that the city might no longer be defiled, and was burned, and the ashes were carried to Bethel, where one of Jeroboam's calves was placed; that place being now in the hands of the king of Judah.

And he put down the idolatrous priests, and he burned a carved imitation of a grove, used in the idol-worship, and strewed the ashes in indignation on the graves of those who had died idolaters. And he defiled all the high places where the idolaters had worshipped, which might be done by casting any kind of dunghill-filth upon them; he also defiled Topheth, a place where infants were cast into the fire, in honour of the idol Molech, amidst the noise of drums and timbrels, which were beaten to drown the cries of the poor little sufferers; intending by this to prevent any man in future from making his son or his daughter to pass through the fire to Molech. Also, he took away the horses which it is likely his father and grandfather had given to the sun, or left to be sacrificed in honour of the sun, which was one of the cruel practices among the heathen. In fact, every altar, and every high place, and every image, and every grove, which had been suffered to remain in Judah for ages, and which former kings had built in their folly and wickedness, Josiah totally destroyed and defiled them; and many of the places he filled with the bones of dead men, supposed to have been idolatrous priests, who had been buried near, and so he made them unfit for uses thought to be sacred, as nothing was thought more defiling than bones.

You may remember reading, in the thirteenth chapter of First Kings, that when king Jeroboam was wickedly burning incense upon an idol-altar, a prophet from Judah "cried against the altar in the word of the Lord, and said, O altar, altar, thus saith the Lord, Behold, a child shall be born unto the house of David, Josiah by name; and upon thee shall he offer the priests of the high places that burn incense upon thee, and men's bones shall be burnt upon thee." And now the word of God came to pass; for Josiah took the bones out of the sepulchres, and burned them upon this altar, and polluted it, "according to the word of the Lord which the man of God proclaimed, who proclaimed these words."





Near the same spot lay the bones of the man of God who spoke the prophecy, but who, having disobeyed God's orders, was killed by a lion; and by his side the prophet, who led him to do wrong, was also laid, according to his order, which he gave his sons before he died. Josiah saw the sepulchre of the man of God, with some remarkable inscription on it, and he asked about it, and when he knew whose sepulchre it was, he would not mix the bones with those of the idolaters, but "he said, Let him alone; let no man move his bones. So they let his bones alone, with the bones of the prophet that came out of Samaria."

Josiah next "slew all the priests of the high places that were there upon the altars, and burned men's bones upon them, and returned to Jerusalem," having destroyed "all the houses also of the high places that were in the cities of Samaria, which the kings of Israel had made to provoke the Lord to anger." Most likely, he had in some way got possession of a small part of Israel, which enabled him thus to show the vengeance of God against the idolatrous offenders.

Josiah, on his return, ordered the solemn ordinance of the pass-over to be devoutly kept. This had been appointed in remembrance of God's sparing Israel, and passing over their dwellings, when the destroying angel killed all the first-born in the land of Egypt. But the kings of Israel had despised and neglected this among God's ordinances, and in Judah it had too often met with the same treatment. Now, however, it was observed with a reverence with which it had not been treated before, since the days of Samuel, the last of the Judges of Israel. Finally, this good king sent away all the wizards who pretended to be prophets of God, and routed out every image and idol that he could find; and, indeed, there was no sort of abomination which he discovered, that he did not destroy.

Yet, in secret, the foolish people loved their foolish idols; and God, who knew their hearts, determined to punish them, and to reject them, as they had rejected him.

This punishment was to be as signal and dreadful as their crimes; and now God took good Josiah away from the evil to come. Pharaoh-nechoh, the king of Egypt, was going to war





with the king of Assyria, and he began to march through the territories of Judah. This Josiah would not allow, as he was at peace with Assyria; and he went to prevent the Egyptian army from going that way. At the very first onset good Josiah was slain. He seems to have forgotten himself in this instance, and not to have consulted God's prophets, whether or not it was right and safe to go. We ought always to ask God's blessing on all our undertakings, and then we may hope to prosper. However, God overruled this error, to take the good king to himself; and his servants took him in his chariot to Jerusalem, "and buried him in his own sepulchre."

The people then took Jehoahaz, Josiah's son, and made him king; but his reign lasted a very short time—only three months. It is probable that he marched against Pharaoh to avenge his father's death, and so was made prisoner by Pharaoh, who also made Judah pay a tribute, amounting, as is thought, to about two hundred and ten thousand dollars.

Jehoahaz was not Josiah's eldest son, so Pharaoh at once deposed him, that he might fight no more against him, and he set his brother Eliakim, who was two years older, upon the throne of Judah; and he gave him a new name, and called him Jehoiakim, which would make him remember that he owed his throne to Pharaoh, who changed his name, as was his custom to do, when he gave any person great honour. You recollect that a former Pharaoh, in this way, gave a new name to Joseph.

Jehoahaz died a prisoner in Egypt.

"Jehoiakim was twenty and five years old when he began to reign; and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem." He was a wicked king.





THE TWENTY-FOURTH CHAPTER OF II. KINGS.

Jehoiakim's Reign, and his Son Jehoiachin's short Reign in Judah, and the Captivity of him and his people, by Nebuchadnezzar—Zedekiah's Reign.

“And Jehoiakim, the king of Judah, went out to the king of Babylon; he, and his mother, and his servants, and his princes, and his officers: and the king of Babylon took him in the eighth year of his reign.”—Ver. 12.

Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, made war against Jehoiakim, and for three years he was his servant, or became tributary to the king of Babylon, paying him money to let him be at peace. At the end of that time, perhaps, encouraged by the king of Egypt, who had just put him on the throne, Jehoiakim refused to pay any more tribute; “and the Lord sent against him bands of the Chaldees, and bands of the Syrians, and bands of the Moabites, and bands of the children of Ammon, and sent them against Judah to destroy it; according to the word of the Lord, which he spake by his servants the prophets.” Nebuchadnezzar, in revenge, sent these bands, or bodies of nations, who were subject to him; but it is said to be the Lord who did it, for he suffered it to be done to punish Judah, as he had threatened. “Surely, at the commandment of the Lord came this upon Judah, to remove them out of his sight, for the sins of Manasseh, according to all that he did. And also for the innocent blood that he shed: for he filled Jerusalem with innocent blood, which the Lord would not pardon.” Manasseh repented, and was pardoned; but his wicked people, who did these cruel deeds for him, and did not repent like him, were not pardoned; and now, therefore, God punished them.

We read, in the thirty-sixth chapter of 2 Chronicles, that Jehoiakim was taken prisoner by Nebuchadnezzar, and bound in fetters, to be carried to Babylon. This most likely broke his heart, and he immediately died.

In the midst of these troubles his son Jehoiachin came to the





crown, in the eighteenth year of his age, "and he reigned in Jerusalem three months. He also did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord, according to all that his father had done."

Nebuchadnezzar's servants, or officers and soldiers, now closely besieged Jerusalem, and Jehoiachin being unable to resist them, went out of the city and surrendered himself prisoner, with "his mother, and his servants, and his princes, and his officers." The king of Babylon then took away all the king's treasures, and all the treasures of the temple, and all the golden vessels which Solomon had made. So Jerusalem was stripped of its wealth, and its chief inhabitants, and its soldiers, and "its craftsmen," or clever workmen, "and smiths," that they might make no more warlike instruments for those that were remaining; "none remained, save the poorest sort of the people of the land;" and ten thousand of its great, and rich, and brave men, with all the king's family, were carried away to Babylon.

The king of Babylon now set up a poor feeble king, without wealth, and without weapons of war, just to keep the poor people in order, who remained in Judah, and were of use to till the land. It is said that he made "Mattaniah, his father's brother, king in his stead;" that is, he made Mattaniah, brother to Jehoiakim, who was Jehoiachin's father, king instead. And the king of Babylon changed Mattaniah's name to Zedekiah—a custom which, I before told you, was often practised in such cases, and which reminded the king that he only held his crown at the pleasure of the king of Babylon.

Jehoiachin's uncle, Zedekiah, as he was now called, was twenty and one years old when he began to reign, and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem. He was as wicked as his bad forefathers, and so God gave him up to ruin. He rebelled against the king of Babylon, hoping to get free from his power; but it was in vain. Judah had now come to the day of reckoning; and Jerusalem, which once had been the favourite place of God, but which had, for numerous years, been so depraved, was speedily to be laid in ruins.





THE TWENTY-FIFTH CHAPTER OF II. KINGS.

The Destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar.

“So Judah was carried away captive out of their land.”—Ver. 21.

In the ninth year of Zedekiah's reign, Nebuchadnezzar marched a large army against the city, built forts, and battered its walls. After two years' siege the city was taken by storm. It was “broken up;” that is, the besiegers made a breach in the wall, by which they entered. Zedekiah and his soldiers, being unable to resist, escaped out of the city at night, by a private way; but they were pursued, and overtaken in the plain of Jericho, where Zedekiah was made prisoner: he was then tried for his rebellion, and sentenced as guilty. His sons were executed before his eyes; and, according to a cruel punishment still practised in the East, by way of punishment for rebellion, his eyes were put out, and he was taken prisoner to Babylon. The king of Babylon afterwards sent Nebuzar-adan, his chief captain, to destroy what remained of Jerusalem, and every house was burned down. The wall of the city was also broken entirely down by the army of the Chaldees. Among other noble buildings, Solomon's fine temple was now completely destroyed, after its being ransacked, and every thing valuable taken out of it, its gold and silver, and brass vessels, and ornaments.

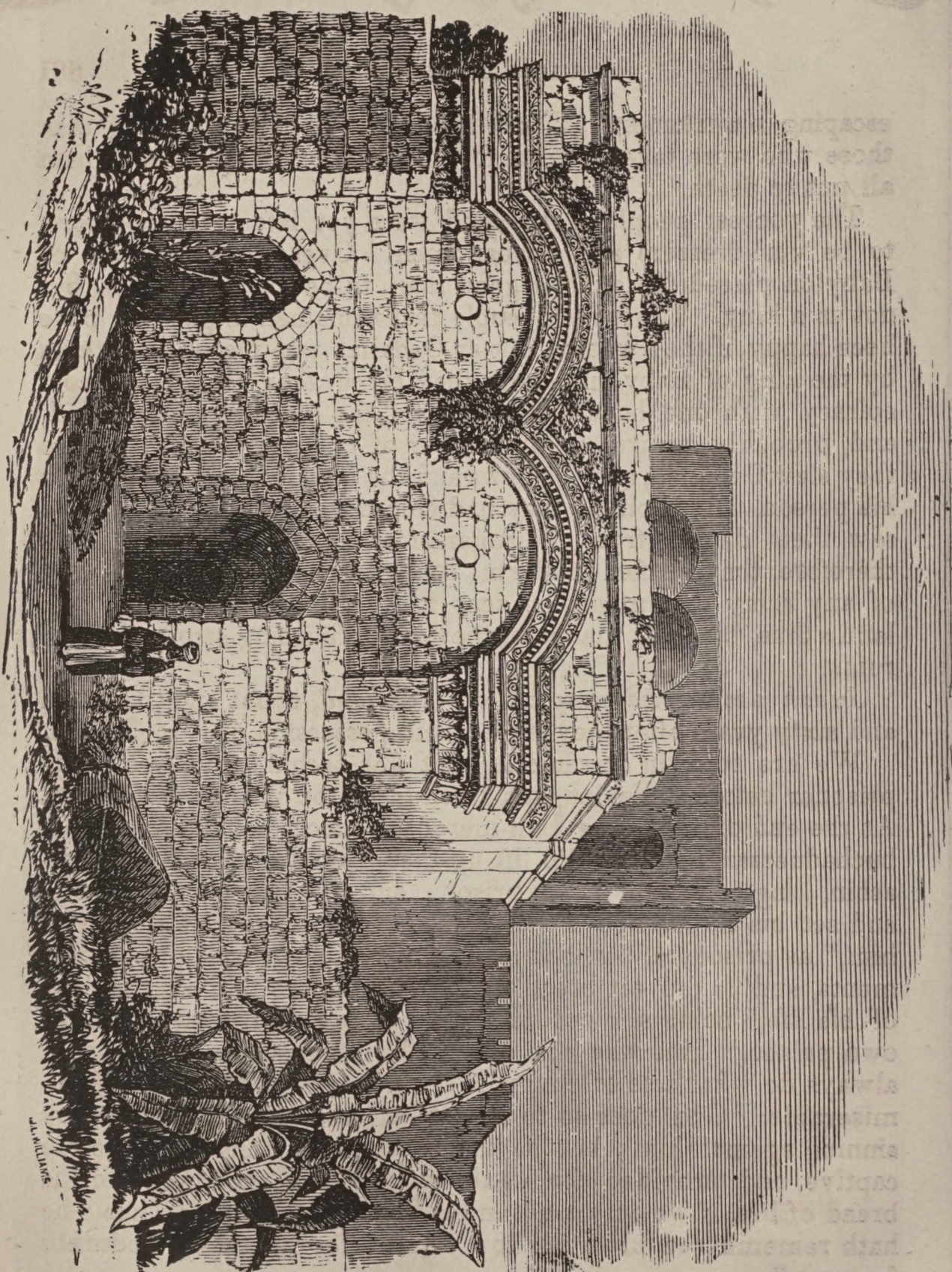
Thus perished the beautiful temple, which had stood four hundred and twenty years; and it is supposed that, among other things that perished in it, was the ark, with what it contained; for this ark was the sign of God's presence, when he was worshipped there in sincerity; but now that presence was gone, and all was desolation.

In making an end of the city, the enemy found a number of persons who had concealed themselves. These were Seraiah, the chief priest, and Zephaniah, the second priest, and some door-keepers of the temple, and a general, and some of the king's counsellors, and a chief officer of state, and sixty gentlemen who had escaped out of the country to be made secure there. Instead of



JERUSALEM WITH ITS WALLS AS SEEN FROM THE NORTHWEST.





GOLDEN GATE, JERUSALEM.



escaping punishment, as they hoped, they were worse off than those who were taken before, for the king of Babylon had them all put to death.

The poorest people of the land were yet left in it, as before, to be vine-dressers and husbandmen. Over these the king of Babylon placed Gedaliah, a good man, to be their governor, but not as a king. The foolish people that remained might now have been happy, if they would; but as Gedaliah was placed over them by the king of Babylon, whom they hated, they joined in a conspiracy with one Ismael, who was of the blood-royal of Israel, and, probably, aspired to the honour of being governor; and so they slew Gedaliah, and the Jews and the Chaldees that were about his person. As soon as they had committed this rash act, they saw their danger from the anger of the king of Babylon; and, therefore, they all fled in alarm to Egypt, to get out of the way of any army that might be sent to punish them in their own land: thus, by their madness, they put a finishing stroke to their ruin.

Judah was carried away out of their land, about eight hundred and sixty years after they were put in possession of it by Joshua.

We are told, in conclusion, that Jehoiachin, who was made prisoner before Zedekiah, remained in prison thirty-seven years. At the end of that time Evil-merodach succeeded his father Nebuchadnezzar, and "he did lift up the" drooping "head of Jehoiachin, king of Judah, out of prison; and he spake kindly to him, and set his throne above the thrones of the kings that were with him," as prisoners, "in Babylon; and he changed his prison garments, and he did eat bread continually before him all the days of his life," being allowed to have a table in his presence in his own palace. This was kind of king Evil-merodach. We should always do what acts of kindness lie in our power to comfort the miserable. God does so to us. We have ruined ourselves by sinning against him; but he has proclaimed deliverance to the captive, and provided for us the garments of salvation, and the bread of life, if we only trust in his Son Jesus Christ. Thus "he hath remembered us in our low estate; for his mercy endureth for ever."





DISTINGUISHING MARKS

OF

The Kings of Israel.

NOTE.—Each dynasty includes a family. To every new family the succession is traced from the first, as the father, and then follow his son, his grandson, or his son's son, and his great grandson; these names not signifying the grandsons or great grandsons of those who last reigned, but of the first on each list.

FIRST DYNASTY.

Father	Jeroboam	The calf-maker.
Son	Nadab	The wicked image of his father.

SECOND DYNASTY.

Father	Baasha	Jeroboam's executioner.
Son	Elah	The drunkard.
	Zimri	The self-murderer.

THIRD DYNASTY.

Father	Omri	The founder of Samaria.*
Son	Ahab	The great idolater.
Grandson	Ahaziah	The devotee of Baal-ze bub.
Grandson and brother of Ahaziah.....	Jehoram, or Joram	Judah's ally.

FOURTH DYNASTY.

Father	Jehu	The destroyer of Baal.
Son	Jehoahaz	Syria's weakened foe.
Grandson	Jehoash, or Joash	Judah's conqueror.
Great grandson.....	Jeroboam II.	Israel's restorer.
Great great grandson...	Zachariah	The last of the Jehus.

FIFTH DYNASTY.

Shallum.....	The king of a month.
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* Tibni reigned over part of Israel during five years of Omri's reign.





SIXTH DYNASTY.

Father Menahem The cruel.
Son Pekahiah The victim of treachery.

SEVENTH DYNASTY.

Pekah..... The long-reigning usurper

EIGHTH DYNASTY.

Hoshea The last king of Israel.

CHARACTERS OF THE KINGS OF JUDAH.

BY MATTHEW HENRY.

David.....	The devout.
Solomon.....	The wise.
Rehoboam.....	The simple.
Abijah.....	The valiant.
Asa.....	The upright.
Jehoshaphat.....	The religious.
Jehoram.....	The wicked.
Ahaziah.....	The profane.
Joash.....	The backslider.
Amaziah.....	The rash.
Uzziah.....	The mighty.
Jotham.....	The peaceable.
Ahaz.....	The idolater.
Hezekiah.....	The reformer.
Manasseh.....	The penitent.
Amon.....	The obscure.
Josiah.....	The tender-hearted.
Jehoahaz.....	The last of the wicked.
Jehoiakim.....	
Jehoiachin.....	
Zedekiah.....	



KINGS OF ISRAEL AND JUDAH. Showing the Contemporary Kings.

ABRIDGED FROM DR. ADAM CLARKE.

NOTE.—The figures under the head *Year Before Christ*, in the first column, show the dates of the years when the kings ascended their thrones.—Thus Jeroboam ascended the throne of Israel 975 years before Christ.—Under the head *Kings of Israel* are the names of the kings in succession, as Jeroboam, Nadab, Baasha, &c.—*Years Reigned*, at the head of the third column, with the figures under, 22, 24, show the number of years the kings reigned.—The fourth column shows, under the head *Remarkable Events*, the principal matters that occurred during the reign.—Thus, 975 years before Christ, Jeroboam became king of Israel, he reigned 22 years, and a remarkable event in his reign was the slaying of the false prophet by the lion. The same explanation serves for the kings of Judah, in the second division of the page. Where certain years are mentioned across the page, they are designed to show that, in those years of a king's reign in Israel, another king began to reign in Judah; or, in the specified year of a king of Judah's reign, another king began to reign in Israel. Thus:—

In the 18th year of Jeroboam Abijah began to reign in Judah.
Nadab began to reign in Israel In the second year of Asa, king of Judah.

I hope my young readers will now plainly see the method of understanding these instructive and somewhat amusing columns.

REGAL STATE OF JUDÆA BEFORE THE DIVISION.

Saul reigned forty years.—David reigned forty years.—Solomon reigned forty years.

ISRAEL AND JUDAH AFTER THE DIVISION OF THE TWELVE TRIBES.

Year before Christ	KINGS OF ISRAEL	Years reigned.	Remarkable Events.	KINGS OF JUDAH.	Years reigned.	Remarkable Events.
975	JEROBOAM	22 .	The disobedient prophet slain by a lion.	REHOBOAM	17 .	
958	In the 18th year of Jeroboam			ABIJAH, or ABIJAM	3 .	
955	In the 21st year of Jeroboam			ASA	41 .	Abolished idolatry out of Judah.
954	NADAB	2 .		In the 2d year of Asa.		
953	BAASHA	24 .	The house of Jeroboam extirpated.	In the 8d year of Asa.		
930	ELAH	2 .		In the 26th year of Asa		
	ZIMRI	7 days				
929	OMRI	12 .	TIRSHI divided the throne with this king for the first five years.			
918	AHAB	22 .	Jericho rebuilt.			





814	In the 5th year of Ahab's reign		JEHOSHAPHAT	 25 .	Sent Levites thro' the land to instruct the people in God's law.
897	AHAZIAH	2 .	In the 18th year of Jehoshaphat.		
896	JORAM, or JEHORAM	12 .	In the 19th year of Jehoshaphat.		
	In the 8th year of Joram		JEHORAM	5 .	
	In the 12th year of Joram		AHAZIAH	1 .	
884	JEHU	28 .	ATHALIAH, Queen	6 .	Murdered all the seed royal, except Joash.
878	In the 7th year of Jehu		JOASH	40 .	
856	JEHOAHAZ	17 .	In the 23d year of Joash		
889	JEHOASH	14 .	AMAZIAH	29 .	Slew in battle 20,000 Edomites. Conquered, and made prisoner by Jehoash.
825	JEROBOAM II.	41 .			
810	In the 16th year of Jeroboam		UZZIAH	52 .	Isaiah began to prophesy at the end of his reign.
773	ZACHARIAH		In the 88th year of Uzziah.		
	He reigned only six months ; and as he did not begin to reign till the 38th year of Uzziah, the people must have had no king for eleven years and a half.				
772	SHALLUM	1 month	In the 80th year of Uzziah.		
771	MENAHEM	10 .	In the 40th year of Uzziah.		
761	PEKAHIAH	2 .	In the 50th year of Uzziah.		
759	PEKAH	20 .	In the 52d year of Uzziah.		
758	In the 2d year of Pekah		JOTHAM	16 .	
742	In the 18th year of Pekah		AHAZ	16 .	
729	HOSHEA	9 .	In the 12th or 14th year of Ahaz		
	According to dates, there must have been a vacancy for some years before this king ascended the throne.		HEZEKIAH	29 .	
726	In the 4th year of Hoshea				





JUDAH AFTER THE CAPTIVITY OF ISRAEL.

IN the sixth year of Hezekiah, Shalmanezar, king of Assyria, took Samaria, carried the Israelites into captivity, and so put AN END TO THE KINGDOM OF ISRAEL, 254 years after the revolt of the ten tribes from Rehoboam.

Year before Christ.	KINGS OF JUDAH.	Years reigned.	REMARKABLE EVENTS.
	HEZEKIAH . .		The king miraculously restored to health.—Sennacherib's army of 185,000 men, destroyed by an angel in one night.
698	MANASSEH . .	. . 55 .	The longest reign in the Jewish annals.
648	AMON	. . 2	
641	JOSIAH	. . 31 .	
610	JEHOAHAZ . .	Reigned but three months.	Purified his country from all idolatry, and begun the work in his eighteenth year.
609	JEHOIAKIM . .	. . 11 .	In this reign Jeremiah the prophet lived.
599	JEHOIACHIN . .	Reigned but three months and ten days.	
598	ZEDEKIAH . .	. . 11 .	The last Jewish king.

Now the city of Jerusalem was taken, the temple burnt, and the people were carried into captivity in Babylon. The kingdom of Judah stood from Solomon 387 years; and after the captivity of the ten tribes of Israel, 133 years.





The first nine chapters are all genealogies, or accounts of families in the order in which one generation lived after another for many ages. We have here all the families that sprang from Adam, from Noah, from Abraham, from Judah, from David, and from all the tribes of Israel. Some of them were, probably, very clever, very brave, very rich, very powerful, very honorable, and very renowned; but the

THE FIRST BOOK OF THE CHRONICLES,

OR,

THE GENEALOGIES OF THE TWELVE TRIBES.

FROM THE FIRST TO THE LAST CHAPTER.

“So all Israel were reckoned by genealogies: and, behold, they were written in the Book of the Kings of Israel and Judah, who were carried away to Babylon for their transgression.”—Chap. ix. 1.

WE left the Jews in a state of captivity in Babylon: we shall, by and by, read of their deliverance. But before we come to that, we have to glance over the Books of Chronicles, which were written after the Jews returned from captivity, in order to preserve the proper record of their families, and to give a particular account of the kings of Judah. This was very important—as from Judah it was expected, according to prophecy, that the Messiah, or Christ, should spring. These books give some particulars, in the life of David, which are not mentioned so precisely in the Kings. They also furnish us with a fuller description of the temple than we had before, and a more lengthened account of Solomon. Some new particulars respecting the kings of Israel are likewise added. The last two chapters, in particular, speak of the beginning of the release of the Jews by Cyrus, as we shall soon have occasion to read.





The first nine chapters are all genealogies, or accounts of families in the order in which one generation lived after another for many ages. We have here all the families that sprung from Adam, from Noah, from Abraham, from Judah, from David, and from all the tribes of Israel.

Some of them were, probably, very clever, very brave, very rich, very powerful, very honourable, and very renowned; but the word of God passes by them all to notice one of whom it is said, "Jabez was more honourable than his brethren." And what made him so honourable? He "called on the God of Israel"—that is, he prayed—and he prayed, "Oh, that thou wouldest bless me indeed!" You see here what it is that makes any one truly honourable—praying. Praying is holding converse with God. It is a great honour to talk with a king, but what is that honour to talking with the King of kings! God notices you when you pray, and he is pleased when you pray, and will honour and bless you. "The way," says Mr. Henry, "to be truly great is to be truly good, and to pray much."

The remaining chapters of this book amount to twenty. They are chiefly repetitions of what we have before read in the books of Samuel and Kings. The tenth chapter gives an account of the fatal battle of Saul with the Philistines. The eleventh treats of David's being anointed king, and of his mighty men. The twelfth contains a list of those who joined David before the death of Saul, when Saul persecuted him from place to place. The thirteenth informs us of David's taking the ark from Kirjath-jearim, when Uzzah was struck dead for meddling with it; and David left it at the house of Obed-edom the Gittite. The fourteenth chiefly records David's victories over the Philistines. The fifteenth describes the bringing of the ark from the house of Obed-edom to the city of David. The sixteenth contains the account of David's appointing proper ministers to worship before the ark; and a thanksgiving psalm composed by him for the occasion. The seventeenth informs us of David's intention to build an house for God, which he told to Nathan the prophet, but respecting which God told him, by Nathan, that his son should build it. The eighteenth repeats the tale of David's victories over his ene



mies, as recorded in the Second Book of Samuel. The nineteenth mentions again the insult offered to David's messengers by Hannon, the son of Nahash, king of the Ammonites, to whom he sent to condole with him on the death of his father; and the subsequent victory gained by Joab over the Ammonites, and over the Syrians whom they had hired to fight with them. The twentieth describes some giants who were slain in David's victories. The twenty-first shows us the sin of David in numbering the people of Israel; his repentance; his choice of three evils as a punishment—when he chose pestilence, and lost seventy thousand men; the stopping of the pestilence by the threshing-floor of Ornan the Jebusite, and the erection of an altar there for thanksgiving to God. In the twenty-second, David charges his son to build an house for God. The twenty-third gives sketches of the Levites, their descent, and offices in the temple. The twenty-fourth arranges the order of the priests. The twenty-fifth, the number of the singers. The twenty-sixth is "concerning the divisions of the porters" of the temple, whose business it was to open and shut its doors, to keep all impure and improper persons from entering into it, or any of the vessels being carried out of it, and to prevent tumults and riots about it. The twenty-seventh mentions the twelve corps of soldiers, with their captains, which served David in rotation every month. The twenty-eighth gives us the exhortation of David to the principal men of Israel, and to his son Solomon, respecting the building of the temple. The twenty-ninth continues the same subject, and concludes with the death of David.

Thus I have given you the contents only of these chapters, as the particulars are already explained in the Books of Samuel and Kings. These contents will refresh your memory; and, if you read the Chronicles, you will find some few little incidents and circumstances pointed out with which you were not made acquainted in the former books, but which you can perfectly understand without further explanation.





THE SECOND BOOK OF CHRONICLES,

OR,

THE GENEALOGIES OF THE TWELVE TRIBES.

FROM THE FIRST TO THE LAST CHAPTER.

“Behold they are written in the story of the Book of the Kings.”

Chap. xxv. 27.

THIS book is a continuation of the former, and therefore it bears the same title; but the Second Chronicles is, properly, a *History of the Kings of Judah*, from whose line the Messiah sprung. It says nothing of the kings of Israel. The Second Chronicles records much about which we have before read; but it has some anecdotes not to be found in the former accounts of the kings.

We shall, with an exception or two, mention only the contents of the chapters of this book, as we did of the former. The perusal of it will recall to your memory what you have already perused in the former historical books; and you will as I have just intimated, gain some additional information, all of which you may, however, now understand without further aid.

The first chapter relates that Solomon, being confirmed in his kingdom, went to Gibeon to sacrifice. The second informs us of Solomon's message to Hiram, king of Tyre, to furnish him with materials and workmen for the building of the temple. The third and fourth record the place and time of building the temple, with the ornaments with which it was adorned. The fifth states





the carrying of the ark into the temple. The sixth contains Solomon's beautiful and solemn prayer at its dedication. The seventh has an account of God's acceptance of the sacrifices offered at the dedication of the temple, when "the fire came down from heaven." The eighth mentions the cities which Solomon built. The ninth informs us of the Queen of Sheba's visit to Solomon, and his great splendour. The tenth records the revolt of the ten tribes, owing to Rehoboam's obstinate and foolish conduct. The eleventh tells us of Rehoboam's preparing an army of a hundred and eighty thousand men of the tribes of Judah and Benjamin, to fight the other tribes of Israel, and recover the dominion over the whole; but being forbidden by the prophet Shemaiah, they returned every man to his own house. The twelfth records the sad fact of the idolatry of Rehoboam and all Israel with him, there being many of the other tribes besides Judah and Benjamin that had joined him. God, therefore, suffered Shishak, the king of Egypt, to punish him, which he did by invading his land, taking his fenced cities, reducing the people to be tributary, and taking away their riches.

The thirteenth chapter tells us of war between Abijah, king of Judah, the son of Rehoboam, and Jeroboam, the king of Israel; the army of Judah consisting of four hundred thousand men, and that of Israel of eight hundred thousand. It also informs us how Abijah addressed the armies of Jeroboam, and tried to prevent the shedding of blood between those who were brethren. But Jeroboam and his people would not hearken to him; and while he was speaking, Jeroboam sent troops behind him, and tried to surround his smaller army. Judah cried to God for help; and when the army of Judah shouted at the sound of their trumpets, the army of Israel was panic-struck, and fled; and, being pursued by Judah, there perished of it the immense number of five hundred thousand chosen men! I have told you before, that those who, in ancient times, copied the Bible, before we were accustomed to print, sometimes made mistakes, though they were so closely watched by purchasers, that no material error could long escape without detection. It is supposed, however, that in this instance, among a few others that have occurred in numbers, five





hundred thousand ought to have been fifty thousand ; the first number being an almost incredible amount to fall in a battle, and unexampled in history.

The fourteenth chapter relates the death of Abijah, and the succession of Asa, in his stead. It also gives an account of an army of Ethiopians which marched against Asa, consisting of a thousand thousands ; according to Josephus, the Jewish historian, it was composed of nine hundred thousand foot, and one hundred thousand horsemen. It tells us also how Asa cried to God, and, trusting in him, by his help, obtained a complete victory. The fifteenth chapter is a narrative of Asa's commendable zeal in destroying the idolatry of his people. The sixteenth records the death of Asa. Asa, you recollect, had a long reign—it lasted forty-one years ; I have told you that he was an upright king, and he drove idolatry out of Judah. In this chapter we learn that “they buried him in his own sepulchre, which he had made for himself in the city of David, and laid him in the bed which was filled with sweet odours and divers kinds of spices prepared by the apothecary's art ; and they made a very great burning for him.” This means that they laid him in very great pomp on a bed of state, or the funeral bed, which, as with other nations, used to be strewed with sweet-smelling flowers, and herbs, and spices. On these occasions, myrrh, aloes, cassia, cinnamon, and the like, were used ; and were strewed, or if made into liquids, were sprinkled, over the bed and shroud ; spices and other things, in great quantities, were also burnt in honour of him. This custom continued till the time of Herod, at whose funeral there were five hundred of his domestics and freed-men burning spices.

The seventeenth chapter records the accession of Jehoshaphat. The eighteenth mentions Jehoshaphat's alliance with the wicked Ahab, king of Israel, by marrying his son Joram to Athaliah, a daughter of Ahab and Jezebel, the vile idolatress. The nineteenth tells us about the good conduct of Jehoshaphat in managing his kingdom. The twentieth chapter states how the Moabites and Ammonites came against Jehoshaphat, who betook himself to fasting and prayer with his people ; “And all Judah stood before the Lord, with their little ones, their wives, and their children.”





Both those that were infants and those that were grown up, were called upon to make supplication to God ; for he hears babes that can only lisp his name, as well as grown persons. The chapter further states that God told the people not to fear, but to stand still on the morrow, and they should see his salvation. And now God's word was fulfilled ; for, through some misunderstanding, the allied army fell out among themselves, and slew one another, and Jehoshaphat, without losing a man, came in for a great spoil.

The twenty-first chapter begins with the reign of Jehoram, the son of Jehoshaphat, under whom Edom revolted ; the same chapter also records his death. The twenty-second chapter commences with the reign of Ahaziah, the youngest son of Jehoram. It tells us of his visiting Jehoram, the son of Ahab, and king of Israel, who was sick ; and of his going to help him in fighting against Jehu, "whom the Lord had anointed to cut off the house of Ahab ;" and that, in the destruction which came upon Ahab, he also perished ; and his mother, Athaliah, then destroyed all the seed royal of Judah, and reigned herself. The twenty-third chapter mentions the making of young Joash king, who was saved from the hands of Athaliah ; and the punishment of that wicked woman, by being slain. The twenty-fourth chapter records the good reign of Joash during the life-time of Jehoiada, the priest ; his ingratitude in slaying Zechariah, the son of Jehoiada, who had raised him to the throne ; his punishment in having all his princes, or chief men, destroyed, and all their riches taken away by the king of Damascus, or of the Syrians ; and his death—being slain by the treachery of his servants, who "conspired against him for the blood of the sons of Jehoiada, the priest," he having, probably, from this, slain more than one.

The twenty-fifth chapter begins with the reign of Amaziah, the son of Joash ; records his punishment of the murderers of his father, and his death, likewise, from a conspiracy. The twenty-sixth chapter is a brief history of the reign of Uzziah, who was a bold warrior, a great builder, "had much cattle," and "loved husbandry." He is sometimes called Azariah, and has been mentioned in the list of the kings of Judah, as having been smitten



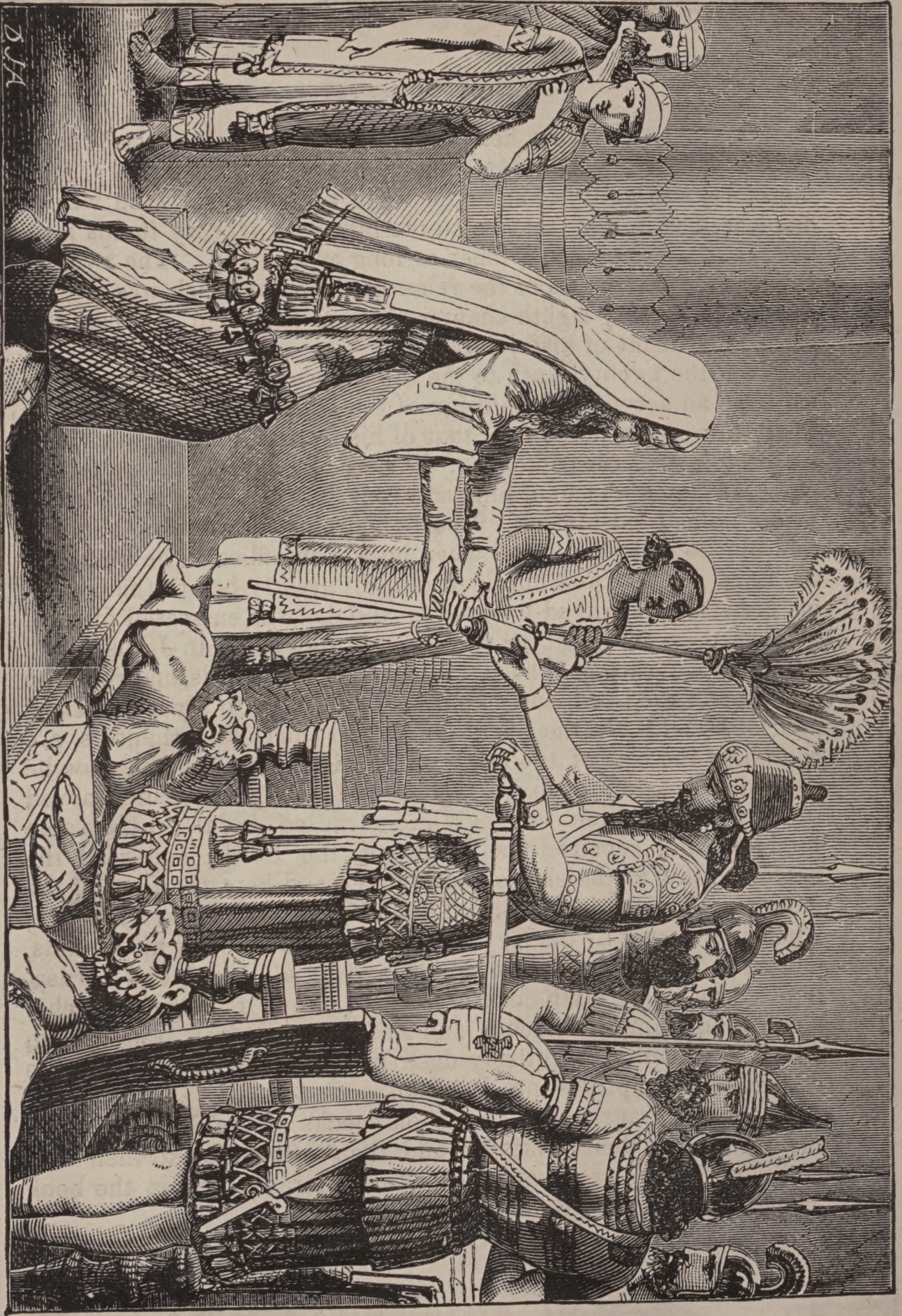


with leprosy. We are here told, that he went into the temple to burn incense, which duty belonged to the priests only, and, therefore, was guilty of an exceedingly profane act. God was so displeased with him, that he smote him with leprosy in his forehead, and he remained a leper as long as he lived. The twenty-seventh chapter treats of the reign of Jotham, which was a good one. The twenty-eighth chapter contains the reign of Ahaz, and gives an account of his idolatry.

From the twenty-ninth to the thirty-second chapters inclusive, we have an account of the reign of the good king Hezekiah. The thirty-third is an account of that of his son, Manasseh; and here we are told that the captains of the king of Assyria, having fought with Manasseh, defeated him, and took him "among the thorns," where he had hid himself, "and bound him with fetters, and carried him to Babylon. And when he was in affliction he besought the Lord his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers, and prayed unto him; and he was entreated of him, and heard his supplication, and brought him again to Jerusalem." And then we learn how he cast away his strange gods, and repaired the altar of the Lord, and "commanded Judah to serve the Lord God of Israel." In the thirty-fourth and thirty-fifth chapters, are contained the acts of the reign of the pious king Josiah; how he purged Jerusalem from its high places, and groves, and carved images, and molten images; and cleansed Judah in the same manner; and repaired the house of the Lord; and read the neglected law to the elders and people; and kept the feast of the passover: and, at last, rashly fought with Necho, king of Egypt, when he was shot by the Egyptian archers, and died of his wounds, lamented by the prophet Jeremiah, and by all Judah and Jerusalem. The thirty sixth chapter records the short reigns of Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, and Zedekiah, the last Jewish king, when Jerusalem was entirely destroyed, and the king and people carried off as captives into Babylon.

The last paragraph of this book speaks of the deliverance of the Jews from their captivity, and their restoration to their own land; of which we have a more particular account in the book which follows—The Book of Ezra.





ARTAXERXES GIVING HIS LETTER TO EZRA.



THE QUEEN OF SHEBA'S VISIT TO SOLOMON



EZRA,

OR,

THE HISTORY OF THE RESTORATION OF THE JEWS FROM
THEIR CAPTIVITY IN BABYLON.

THE FIRST AND SECOND CHAPTERS OF EZRA.

The Proclamation of Cyrus for Restoring the Temple.

“Thus saith Cyrus, king of Persia, The Lord God of heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth; and he hath charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah.”—
Chap. i. 2.

WE have seen to what a state of misery the Jews brought themselves by their wilful disobedience of God's commands, and repeatedly sinning against him: and I cannot too often tell you, my inquiring friend, that sin, sooner or later, will be sure to be punished, unless God helps us in time to repent and turn from all our transgressions. I rejoice, too, that I am able to remind you, again and again, that pardon for our sins is to be obtained—and only to be obtained—through Jesus Christ, who died for sinners on the cross. It may almost seem unnecessary to tell you often of this, but, indeed, it is not so. Too many forget that they are sinners, and too many, who confess it, neglect to seek earnestly





for pardon and mercy while they can, and so die in their sins—which is to die without hope of everlasting life.

But now let us return to the Jews. Long had they wept by the rivers of Babylon, and their musicians, who used to play their sweet harps in Israel to the praise of God, had hung them upon the willows growing in abundance upon the banks of the rivers, expecting never to be called to use them again. But, after seventy years of captivity, light broke out on their night of darkness, and they saw the dawn of another day of hope and joy; for their long captivity was more dismal to them than a dark night is to us, and their prospect of deliverance more cheering than even to us are the first beams of the morning sun, peeping into the windows of our chamber, and inviting us to rise.

Before we notice the contents of this book, it may be proper to tell you who Ezra was. He was a priest very skilful in the law, the son of Seraiah, the high priest, who was slain by Nebuchadnezzar. He was also a ready scribe in the law of Moses, and a careful student and collector of the sacred books. He has been called a second Moses, having been instrumental, like him, in leading Israel out of captivity; in preserving the holy law as Moses gave it; and having lived, as it is said, the same number of years, that is, one hundred and twenty.

The first chapter begins with the proclamation of Cyrus, the king of Persia, who having conquered Babylon, as Babylon had conquered the Jews, found the Jews captives there, was moved by God to set them all at liberty, and gave them every encouragement to return to their own country. The proclamation is very pompous, for he talks of "all the kingdoms of the earth," belonging to him; but this is the style used by the eastern princes, who to this day think themselves the greatest of all monarchs. He, however, had a very great extent of territory, gained by conquest. An ancient historian says, he ruled over all Asia; and the boundaries of his dominions, in particular, embraced a large portion of that immense quarter of the globe, including at least above twenty nations! It is, however, pleasing to see how Cyrus owns the dominion of God above his dominion, and says, "The Lord God of heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth." God





certainly permitted him to punish the Babylonians by conquest, as they had punished other nations, and thus, by war, he suffered one wicked people to be the scourge of another; and when the Jews were in a state of mind to repent of their past offences, he again mercifully appeared to save them. The hearts of kings being in his hands, as well as the hearts of other men, he then prepared the heart of Cyrus to grant them deliverance, and this history shows us how it was received.

In his proclamation, Cyrus says to the Jews, "The Lord God of heaven hath charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Who is there among you of all his people?—his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and build the house of the Lord God of Israel (he is the God,) which is in Jerusalem."

Most eagerly did "the chief of the fathers of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests and the Levites, accept of this release, for God had raised up their spirits to go up to build the house of the Lord."

Cyrus also commanded that those who were rich should help those who were poor, and give them silver, gold, goods, and cattle, to enable them to return and live in their own country. So "all that were about them," the Chaldeans as well as the rich Jews, helped forward the return to the desolate land.

Besides the money, goods, and cattle, thus given to these people, God also inclined the heart of Cyrus to give up all the rich plunder of the temple, which Nebuchadnezzar had carried away. This consisted of golden and silver chargers or dishes, knives, basins, and other vessels of gold and silver, amounting in all to five thousand four hundred.

The second chapter tells us how many "went up out of the captivity," and begins thus:—"Now these are the children of the province that went up out of the captivity." The Jews are here called "children of the province," because Judah was no longer a flourishing kingdom, but a province or conquered country, governed by the deputies of the conquerors. Some of these are called after their fathers, as the "children of Asaph;" and some after the places from which they were carried away





captive, as "the children of Bethlehem." The whole number that returned to their own country is here stated at forty-two thousand three hundred and sixty, besides seven thousand servants, and two hundred singing men. But then these were not the whole of the Jews. You have read before that many of the lower orders were left in the country to till the ground; but all that were ingenious, as artificers, or rich, or had any influence in the country, were taken away. Moreover, many now fixed in Babylon, and who had no love for their own country, and no religion to make them desirous of serving God in his temple, remained behind. Among those named as going out of captivity, you will read of the Nethinims; these were they who waited upon the Levites in the temple. In the sixty-third verse you also read, that "the Tirshatha would not let the children of the priests, that could not prove their genealogies, eat of the most holy things, till there stood up a priest with Urim and with Thummim. The Tirshatha is a word that signifies the governor, and means the chief man in authority over the Jews, which some suppose to have been Nehemiah. Of the Urim and Thummim you have before read, and you may remember that, through the Urim and Thummim, the priest used to inquire of the Lord for direction; but now this means of inquiry was lost, and till it should be recovered, if it ever should—when it might be found out whether these doubtful persons had a right to live at the altar—the governor would not allow them to partake of those parts of the offerings and sacrifices which belonged to the priests.

See how God can do his people good, when after offending him, they return to him with all their hearts! On account of their sins, they were chastised, by being made captives, and banished from their country, stripped of every thing. Now they are willing and glad to enjoy their privileges, and know how to value them, and wish to return to the service of God, he makes all things to work together for their good. Their masters set them free, they are restored to their country, and the hearts of many are opened to aid them; and, as in the former days, the Egyptians aided their fathers with their "jewels of silver, and jewels of gold, and raiment," in escaping from the house of bondage, God now sends





them back abounding in riches. In the catalogue of their wealth there are mentioned, seven hundred and thirty-six horses, two hundred and forty-five mules, four hundred and thirty-five camels, six thousand seven hundred and twenty-five asses, and gold, silver, and precious stuffs. The amount of their gold has been computed at three hundred and eighty-one thousand two hundred and fifty dollars, which does not include the rich vessels of the temple that were restored. Besides the value of the gold, we must also notice that of the silver, which is reckoned at two hundred and twenty-five thousand dollars; making altogether, exclusive of the temple utensils, the sum of six hundred and six thousand dollars in gifts of gold and silver.

Thus, we find God, in the midst of judgments, remembered mercy, and gave the Jews favour in the land of their captivity.

Before I close this chapter, I must, however, prevent a mistake which you may be liable to make, without an explanation. The Jews here released were only those of the tribes of Judah and Benjamin, which formed the kingdom of Judah. These, you remember, were carried away captives by Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon; and Babylon being conquered by Cyrus king of Persia, they were now released by that conqueror. But the ten tribes, which formed the kingdom of Israel, were made captives by the Assyrians, and they were so scattered about by their conquerors, that they mixed themselves with the heathen, or were transported to very distant places, and they were never restored. Inquiries have often been made to see if any remnant of them can be found, but all in vain; and now for twenty-five hundred years, no one knows any thing of them or their descendants.

THE THIRD CHAPTER OF EZRA.

The laying of the Foundation of the Second Temple.

"And all the people shouted with a great shout, when they praised the Lord, because the foundation of the house of the Lord was laid."—Ver. 11.





Having been restored to their land, the Jews did not long delay the rebuilding of the temple ; but as the length of time it would take to rear such a superstructure was too long to wait for publicly worshipping God, they immediately set to work and prepared the altar, headed by Jeshua the priest, and Zerubbabel the chief prince. To this they were the more urged, from the circumstance of their having many enemies around them, who now dwelt in the land ; and they had some apprehension that they might personally impede them in their labours, or gain some alteration of the permission granted them to rebuild their temple.

When the altar was erected they offered up the continual burnt-offering, and observed all the set feasts of the Lord, and offered every man's free-will offering. And then they gave money to the masons to buy stones, and to the carpenters to buy timber, for the new temple. And they gave provisions to the people of Tyre and Zidon—who, probably, liked to be so paid in preference to receiving money—and from them they obtained cedar.

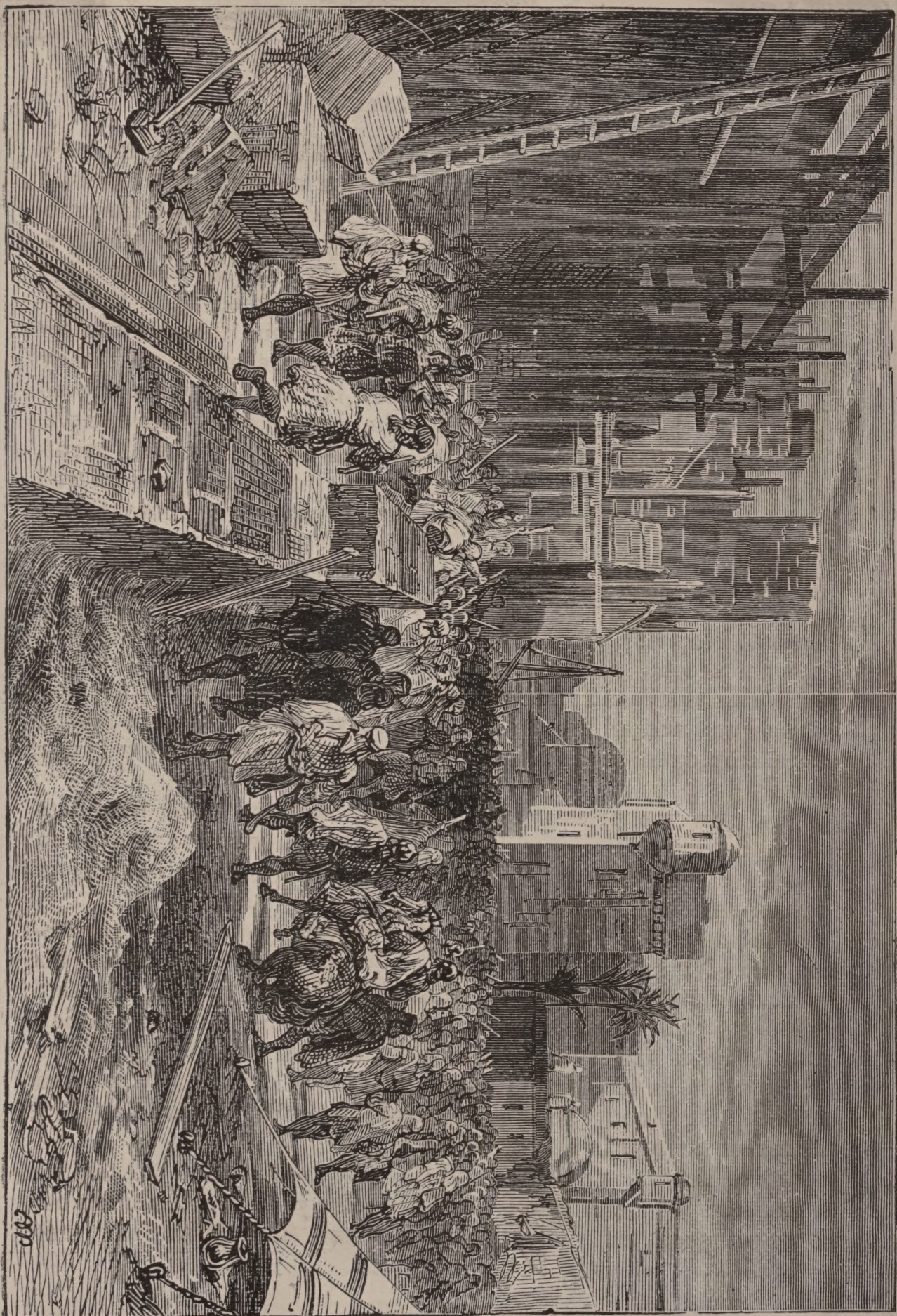
In the second year of their restoration, and when the materials were ready and the ground properly cleared, the building was begun ; and all the Levites of twenty years of age and above, were employed in helping on the work in every way in their power.

And now the priests were appointed to blow their trumpets while the foundation was laying ; and the Levites to play upon their cymbals, which were musical metal instruments like hollow basins, held in each hand, and struck one against another.

And the priests and Levites “sang together by course, in praising and giving thanks unto the Lord, because he is good, for his mercy endureth for ever toward Israel.” By singing “by course,” is meant, that they sang by turns, and answered one another, praising God for bringing them back to their own land, and enabling them to rebuild the temple. “And all the people shouted with a great shout, when they praised the Lord, because the foundation of the house of the Lord was laid.”

It was now between fifty and sixty years since the old temple was destroyed ; and many of the old men yet lived to remember it ; and when the foundation of the new house was laid, they





THE BUILDING INTERRUPTED.



RUINS OF TYRE



"wept with a loud voice." Why? Were they not glad too? Yes, they were glad; but they had also reason to weep, for they had seen what their younger brethren had not, and what they never could expect to see. They had no riches to build so splendid a temple as that which had been laid in ruins. And if they could have made it as splendid, its chief glory was departed. The most precious treasures it contained were for ever gone;—the heavenly fire, the mercy-seat, the heavenly manna, Aaron's rod that budded, the sensible presence of God, and, most probably, the Urim and Thummim: all were lost in the general desolation.

Thus, with a singular mixture of joy and sorrow, was this second temple begun; for "the people could not discern the shout of joy from the noise of the weeping of the people; for the people shouted with a loud shout, and the noise was heard afar off."

The prophet Haggai, however, comforted them on this occasion, by assuring them that the glory of this latter house should exceed that of the former, because the Lord (Jesus Christ) was to come to this temple, and fill it with his glory.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER OF EZRA.

The Building of the Temple hindered.

"Then ceased the work of the house of God, which is at Jerusalem."—Ver. 24.

No sooner had the Jews begun to rebuild their temple, than the Samaritans, who greatly disliked them, and whom they also greatly disliked, used every kind of artifice to stop their work.

When they heard that these "children of the captivity," who had long been captives, or were the sons of captives, and who were still subjects of Cyrus—when they heard that they were building the temple unto the Lord God of Israel, they went to Zerubbabel, the prince, and to the chief of the fathers, and said, "Let us build with you." They pretended to want to share in the temple, which they knew the Jews could not allow; and they





said, "We seek your God, as ye do." Now this was not true, for they worshipped idols. "Zerubbabel and Jeshua, and the rest of the chiefs of the fathers," very properly refused their aid, and said, "Ye have nothing to do with us, to build an house unto our God;" for they were neither of the same nation nor of the same religion.

Then these people, and others that united with them, who had been sent to occupy the land when Judah was carried into captivity, all united to thwart the work. They even hired persons to make it their business to contrive schemes against them. They could certainly impede them in various ways. Sometimes by quarrelling with the workmen; sometimes by hindering the purchase or arrival of materials; and sometimes persuading the king's servants not to allow them any aid, in carrying the decree of Cyrus into execution. If Cyrus had been at home, perhaps he would have inquired about their progress; but history informs us, that about this time he was engaged in wars abroad with the Lydians and Scythians, and, so, leaving his son—who was no friend to the Jews—to govern in his absence, the work went on but slowly, and attended by many discouragements.

Ahasuerus—or Cambyses, as he is called in other histories—succeeded his father Cyrus; and, as soon as he was placed on the throne, the enemies of the Jews wrote letters of complaint against them, to make him look upon them with greater jealousy and dislike.

In the same way they afterwards wrote to Artaxerxes. He is thought by some to have been an impostor, who, feigning himself to be the brother of Cambyses—who had been put to death—usurped the empire. Some, however, think that this is another name given to Ahasuerus, who is also called Darius; Artaxerxes being a common name for the kings of Persia, just as Pharaoh was for the kings of Egypt, and as Czar is now for the Emperors of Russia.

We have here the copy of the letter sent to the king, and signed by the principal men who lived in the land.

"Thy servants, the men on this side the river"—that is, beyond the river Euphrates, "and, at such a time"—meaning the date.



"Be it known unto the king, that the Jews which came up from thee to us, are come unto Jerusalem, building the rebellious and the bad city, and have set up the walls thereof and joined the foundations.

"Be it known now unto the king, that, if this city be builded, and the walls set up again, then will they not pay toll, tribute, and custom, and so thou shalt endamage the revenue of the kings.

"Now, because we have maintenance from the king's palace, and it was not meet for us to see the king's dishonour, therefore have we sent and certified the king, that search may be made in the book of the records of thy fathers; so shalt thou find in the books of the records, and know that this city is a rebellious city, and hurtful unto kings and provinces, and that they have moved sedition," or, been troublesome, "within the same of old time; for which cause was this city destroyed.

"We certify the king, that, if this city be builded again, and the walls thereof set up, by this means thou shalt have no portion on this side the river."

The last clause of the letter was enough to frighten the king, for it warned him that, if he did not take care, the Jews would not only shake off his yoke, and refuse to pay tribute themselves, but would seize on all his dominions on that side the river, and annex them to their own.

So the king directly caused search to be made; and he found in the records an account of past efforts made by the Jews to set themselves free from their conquerors—which certainly was very natural—and he wrote to his chief officers in the land of Judæa, and told them he had found that the Jews had been seditious, and that, in past times, they had had mighty kings, who had subdued the neighbouring nations, and therefore he commanded that the city should not be built till further orders.

Delighted at their success, the opponents of the Jews now made haste to Jerusalem, and took with them forces enough to oblige them to give up their work.

It is computed by the reigns of these kings, that the Jews had now been employed on their temple during fourteen years, and





the work "ceased unto the second year of the reign of Darius, king of Persia," which was for about three years.

THE FIFTH AND SIXTH CHAPTERS OF EZRA.

The Building of the Temple continued.

"Then rose up Zerubbabel, the son of Shealtiel, and Jeshua, the son of Jozadak, and began to build the house of God which is at Jerusalem; and with them were the prophets of God helping them."—Chap. v. 2.

In the second year of Darius, king of Persia, God stirred up the prophet Haggai and Zechariah to reprove the Jews for their sloth, and negligence of building the temple, when they were careful enough to raise up goodly houses for themselves to dwell in. They also reprov'd them for being intimidated by the command of the king of Persia, which only forbade the building of the city—that is, the walls of it—but not the temple, any more than the walls of their own houses; and besides, there was now a new king, from whom they had not so much to fear.

The prophets roused the spirits of Zerubbabel and Jeshua, and they again urged on the building of the temple, while the prophets helped them with encouragement and advice.

The old governors of the land were now dead, or removed by the new king, but their successors still interrupted the Jews. So Tatnai, the governor, and Shethar-boznai, and others, went to them and said, "Who hath commanded you to build this house, and to make up this wall?"—that is, the wall of the temple.

Then the Jews told them who were the persons engaged in erecting the building. And "the eye of their God was upon the elders of the Jews," looking favourably at them, so that they felt a secret comfort from heaven encouraging their hearts to go on with their work, till the matter should be settled by Darius, to whom it was referred.

The governor Tatnai then wrote to Darius, and told him that





the Jews were going on with their temple, and that they said that Cyrus had made a decree to permit them so to do. And they advised the king to have the records searched, to see whether or not such a decree was really made in their favour.

Darius, therefore, gave orders to search the place where the government writings were kept, but where, it appears, the decree of Cyrus was not found. However, on further inquiry, it was discovered at Achmetha, which was a city in Media, where the kings of Persia had their summer palace.

Darius, having learned its contents, then ordered the governors not to disturb the Jews, but to help them with money to go on with their work, and with cattle, and whatever they wanted for their sacrifices. And he also threatened that whoever interrupted them from that time, should be hung on a gallows made of the wood of his own house, and his habitation should be completely destroyed, and made only fit for a dunghill. Tatnai immediately obeyed the commands of the king. "And the elders of the Jews builded, and they prospered through the prophesying of Haggai, the prophet, and Zechariah, the son of Iddo. And they builded, and finished it," that is, the temple—"according to the commandment of the God of Israel, and according to the commandment of Cyrus, and Darius, and Artaxerxes, king of Persia." The writer of the history here mentions the different kings who favoured the Jews after their captivity; respecting the last named there is, however, some difference of opinion; Darius had a son named Xerxes, who was his successor, but some think Artaxerxes Longimanus, his grandson, is here intended, for history states that he sent Ezra to Judæa with new privileges, and that he was kind to Nehemiah.

Thus the house was finished "in the sixth year of the reign of Darius the king."

When the building was completed, "the children of Israel," that is, those of the ten tribes that remained after the body of the people were carried captive, or came with the Jews at their return—"the priests and the Levites, and the rest of the children of the captivity," those of the tribes of Judah and Benjamin, "kept the dedication of this house of God with joy." And they offered "an





hundred bullocks, two hundred rams, four hundred lambs ; and, for a sin-offering for all Israel, twelve he-goats, according to the number of the tribes of Israel." And they arranged the order of the priests to do the work in the temple by turns. And at its proper time, they kept the passover. They also kept the feast of unleavened bread seven days, with joy. And God turned the heart of the "king of Assyria to them, to strengthen their hands in the work of the house of God, the God of Israel." Cyrus and his successors possessed all the rights of the kings of Assyria as well as of Persia, and therefore were called by both names.

We should have thought that, after such an instance of severe punishment in being carried into captivity, and, after such a display of God's goodness in their restoration, the Jews would never again have offended so grievously against God, but, when we come to the New Testament, we shall have occasion to speak of a second and more terrible captivity and dispersion, from which they have as yet never recovered.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER OF EZRA.

Ezra's prosperous Embassy to Babylon, and return to Jerusalem, favoured by King Artaxerxes.

"Then Ezra went up from Babylon ; and he was a ready scribe in the law of Moses which the Lord God of Israel had given : and the king granted him all his request, according to the hand of the Lord his God upon him."—Ver. 6.

This chapter begins with an account of Ezra himself, tracing back his descent from Aaron the high priest. It appears that in the reign of Artaxerxes, or, as some suppose, the seventh year of the reign of Darius, whom they consider as the same king, Ezra went a second time from Babylon, having first gone there with Zerubbabel. He was a scribe, as we have before said. He was a well-instructed scribe, having carefully studied the law ; and so he was well qualified to teach it to others. It is said that "the king





granted him all his request, according to the hand of the Lord his God upon him." What the request was is not stated, but, without doubt, by his being again at Babylon, and making his applications there, he was employed as a sort of ambassador, to obtain royal assistance in carrying into complete effect all the decree of Cyrus in favour of the Jews. God's favour was with him; and he prospered in his object. On his return, a great number of the children of Israel—perhaps some of the ten tribes which had been mingled with Judah and Benjamin—and also many of those who had to fill offices in the temple, finding it now finished, returned with him.

It is said that "Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord." Now God only can prepare the heart to do any good thing; as Solomon says, "The preparation of the heart is from the Lord." But this expression only means, in this place, that he took great pains to know God's will in his law. And not only to inquire what God's will was, but also "to do it." It is, indeed, a great wickedness to know all about God's will, and yet not to serve him when we know it; but many are so wicked as to know the Bible, and not to practise its holy commands. I hope God will give you grace to do better. I pray God that he may help you; and I trust that you will yourself, dear young reader, pray to him also. A short prayer by King David will just suit you; and if you offer it up sincerely, in the name of Jesus Christ, God will hear you. "Show me thy ways, O Lord, teach me thy paths; lead me in thy truth, and teach me; for thou art the God of my salvation." Ezra learned to do God's will, that he might glorify God by practising it:—

"So let our lips and lives express
The holy gospel we profess:
So let our works and virtues shine,
To prove the doctrines all divine."

Ezra also learned the holy truth of God, that he might "teach in Israel statutes and judgments;" that is "the laws moral, ceremonial, and civil." By moral laws are meant those which relate to our duty to God and our neighbour—not to swear, break the Sabbath, lie, steal, and do other wicked things, but to love God





and to love our neighbours, and to try and do them good. By ceremonial laws, are intended those which regulated all the customs of Jewish worship. And by civil laws, are pointed out those which regulate our conduct in society towards each other, especially as citizens, watching over each other's interests as a body of people, and behaving orderly in our connexion with mankind around us.

Such a man as Ezra, who learned, and did, and taught these laws, was indeed a blessing to his nation. To show how God approved of him, he gave him the greatest success at the court of Babylon; for the king wrote a letter granting him a number of favours for his people, and giving him very great power. He wrote a letter which, you will observe, begins, "Artaxerxes, king of kings, unto Ezra the priest." This title supremely, or above all, belongs to Jesus Christ, who is "King of kings, and Lord of lords." It was however neither a profane, nor a false title, as used by Artaxerxes, for he was king over other kings, who having been conquered by his people, were tributary to him, and held their crowns at his pleasure. In this letter, the king granted permission to all the Jews which yet remained at Babylon, to go to Jerusalem. He also authorized him to inquire into all the behaviour of the Jews at Jerusalem, and to see if it was such as the law of his God required. He, likewise, with his nobles, gave him rich presents, and he granted him leave to collect gifts of gold and silver, and to take them to Jerusalem in aid of the temple; particularly to buy beasts for the purpose of offering them up to God according to the law. He, moreover, gave him vessels of silver, gold, and copper, out of his own treasures, that he might take them for the temple; and, if more aid were necessary, he was to go to the king's treasure-house, where his taxes were laid up, and procure what he wanted. He might even take, if he needed it, "one hundred talents of silver," equal to one hundred and seventy-six thousand dollars. Also, "one hundred measures of wheat," which were about seventy-five wine gallons; and "one hundred baths of wine," and "one hundred baths of oil;" a bath holding about seven wine gallons. In addition, he was to have as much salt as he thought proper, because this was used in all offerings, as, from its purifying qualities, it was an emblem of purity, showing us that God only accepts of what is





pure ; and so, if we give our hearts to him, he will not accept of them unless by his grace they are first made holy. The king also ordered the ministers of the holy religion to be free from all taxes ; and he authorized Ezra to appoint wise and just magistrates to govern the people, and to punish those that broke the laws.

When Ezra thought of this kindness of the king, he blessed God, and owned that it was he who put it into the king's heart. And Ezra gladly undertook to fulfil all his commission ; and, for this purpose, went to Jerusalem, accompanied by many chief men of Israel, whom he now persuaded to accompany him.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER OF EZRA.

Ezra forwards the work of God at Jerusalem.

“And they furthered the people, and the house of God.”—
Ver. 36.

In this chapter we have an account of those Jews that accompanied Ezra from Babylon to Jerusalem ; and how he gathered them together, procured ministers for the temple, proclaimed a fast to ask for God's protection, as he would not ask the king for soldiers, lest it should show a want of confidence in God, and so dishonour him before the heathen ; and then how he divided amongst them the treasures he had procured for the temple services, the whole of which a learned writer reckons to have been worth five million one hundred and ninety-three thousand dollars ; and some reckon it at double that. Then they left the river Ahava, where they had assembled, went to Jerusalem, took particular account of the treasure, and “offered burnt-offerings unto the God of Israel,” and “they furthered the people and the house of God,” adding to the comfort of the former and to the beauty of the latter.





THE NINTH AND TENTH CHAPTERS OF EZRA.

Judah's sinful Alliances, and general Reformation.

- "Now, therefore, make confession unto the Lord God of your fathers, and do his pleasure; and separate yourselves from the people of the land, and from the strange wives.
- "Then all the congregation answered and said with a loud voice, As thou hast said, so must we do."—Chap. x. 11, 12.

I think I have more than once told you, that God had commanded the Israelites not to marry the people of other lands, which were all heathen, and, therefore, served false gods. The reason of this, I also think, I have before mentioned to you—it was, lest they should be seduced by such marriages to forsake God, and to become the worshippers of idols.

When Ezra had settled all that we have seen about the temple, some of the pious princes went to him in great grief, and lamented that this people had acted in a very ungrateful manner towards God, and, instead of serving him more faithfully, united themselves with idolaters, "doing according to their abominations." Widowers had even married Canaanitish and other heathen wives, and sanctioned the same marriages among their sons; not only so, but some of the princes and rulers, who, from their higher rank, ought to have set a better example, had been guilty of the like offence against God's laws.

When Ezra heard these things, he rent his clothes, plucked off the hair of his head and beard, and sat down silent on the ground. These were all customs among the Jews expressive of the greatest grief. While Ezra thus grieved, a number of pious men gathered themselves around him; and at the time of the evening sacrifice, Ezra rose up, fell upon his knees, and lamented the sins of the people, and then left himself and them in the hands of God as a God of mercy.

Seeing his excessive grief, great numbers had now gathered around him, and, while he wept, they also wept—men, women,





and children. At length, one whose name was Shecaniah acknowledged the guilt of the people, and expressed a hope that they would do the evil complained of no more. He, therefore, advised that all the strange wives, which had been taken against the command of God, should be put away ; and the chief priests, Levites, and all Israel, swore it should be done as Shecaniah and Ezra had proposed.

Within three days after this, all Judah and Benjamin assembled, being called together,—and Ezra told them how they had sinned against God, and entreated them to put away their heathen wives. And they all said they would do so.

Proper inquiry was then made about all their marriages, and in three months the examination was finished.

It was found that all classes had some who were guilty ; and that in all, about one hundred and thirteen had married heathen women.

Thus was this reformation effected. Those who did not approve of it, had no choice but to be “ separated from the congregation ;” that is, they were not allowed to worship God in his temple, and were to be cut off from the people, and be left without the hope of true Israelites. Thus, my dear readers, we have no choice between serving sin and serving God. If we continue to serve sin, we must be for ever cut off from his favour ; but if we forsake sin, and serve him, he is full of grace and mercy. and will not forsake us.





THE BOOK OF NEHEMIAH,

OR,

A CONTINUATION OF THE BOOK OF EZRA.

THE FIRST, SECOND, THIRD, AND FOURTH CHAPTERS OF NEHEMIAH.

Nehemiah's Affliction at the State of Jerusalem—King Artaxerxes permits him to go and rebuild its broken Walls—Sanballat and others oppose Nehemiah—The Building of the Wall of Jerusalem—The opposition of Sanballat and his Party—The determined Conduct of Nehemiah.

“The God of heaven, he will prosper us; therefore we, his servants, will arise and build.”—Chap. ii. 20.

THIS book begins with the state of the Jews at Jerusalem about ten years after the period mentioned in the Book of Ezra, and in the twentieth year of the reign of Artaxerxes. God so ordered matters, that at this time, some Jews had occasion to go to Shushan, or Susa, an ancient city in which was the winter palace of the kings of Persia. Nehemiah, a pious Jew, **was at the time** the king's cupbearer, which was a place of great honour, and gave him an opportunity of being frequently in the king's presence, and that at a time when his heart was cheerful, and he was disposed to be kind and good-natured. This good man having inquired of his





GILBEAD BEYOND JORDAN.



JEREMIAH WEEPING OVER JERUSALEM.



brethren, the Jews, how things were going on at Jerusalem, was grieved to learn that the people were "in great affliction and reproach," and that the wall of the city was still "broken down," and the gates were "burned with fire," as the Babylonians had left them.

Then Nehemiah was very sorry, and he "wept and mourned" for the sins of his country, which had been the cause of all its suffering; and he "fasted and prayed before the God of heaven," beseeching him in behalf of his people, and that he might find favour with the king, in trying to do something for their good.

At length, when he was waiting on the king, as he did not usually look dull,—for good men ought to look happy,—the king wondered to see him so dejected. And he told him he had great cause to be sad, for he had learned that the chief city of his beloved country was still in ruins. Then the king wished to know what he could do for him; Nehemiah paused a moment and prayed to God, perhaps thanking him for the favour he had already found with the king—for we should never forget to praise God for our mercies—and perhaps, also, asking God for wisdom to give a right answer. Then he asked the king to let him go to Jerusalem, and restore it from its ruins. And the king gave him leave to go, and allowed him to fix his own time for staying. He next asked the king for letters to the governors of the country through which he should pass, that he might meet with every help from them in proceeding on his journey, and also, for a letter to the keeper of the king's forest, that he might obtain from him any quantity of timber that might be necessary, for the workmen to use in rebuilding what was broken down. This too the king granted. It seems his heart was quite open and kind. Some people would say, Nehemiah was quite lucky to meet with the king in such a humour, but Nehemiah—like a good man who knew that the hearts of kings, as well as other men, are in the hands of the Lord—sees all his success as coming from God, and he says, "The king granted me according to the good hand of my God upon me."

Nehemiah now set off, accompanied with a guard of honour from the king, to protect him all the way till he reached Jerusalem.





The enemies of the Jews were mad enough at seeing one of their countrymen arrive with so much dignity and authority, for they had probably some strong reasons to fear their recovering any power. Some had got possession of lands, which they, perhaps, thought they must at length give up to the original owners. The Ammonites, the Moabites, and the Samaritans, having formerly been conquered by the Jews, were now pleased to see them humbled and conquered too, and all the heathen hated them because they worshipped the true God.

However, Nehemiah thought it prudent to make no bustle about what he was going to do, lest he should be opposed in his work. So he went in the night time, and looked all over the ruins of the city. And when he had seen what ought to be done, and laid his plans, he called together the chief men of the Jews, and he advised them to build up the wall which surrounded the city; and he told them of God's goodness to him, and of his success with the king. They were so much delighted at this news, that they agreed at once to set to work and build, and encouraged one another in the undertaking.

Then Sanballat, who was a Moabite, and a governor of the Samaritans, and Tobiah, an Ammonite, who had been raised from a slave, and who was now a governor as well as Sanballat, and Geshem, who was, most likely, an Arab chief,—tried all in their power to frighten the Jews, that they might not go on with their work. But Nehemiah knew what he was about, and he told them that he was sure God would prosper his countrymen, and therefore they should certainly build; and as for those who opposed them, they had no right to meddle with the affairs of Jerusalem, and would do better to mind their own business.

As soon as it was decided that the city should all be built up, every man took his share in the work, the priests first setting the example by building the sheep gate, which was most likely the gate through which the sheep were brought that were to be sacrificed in the temple. And, in addition to the priests, tradesmen and workmen of all sorts helped to build the walls, for some could remove the rubbish, and others could collect and carry materials for the work and assist in handing them to the workmen, even



though they could do no more. A few skilful hands only will soon build a house, but they must have many labourers to dig the foundation, and to fetch timber, and bricks, and lime, and mix the mortar, and carry the hods. Even the rulers united in this work, and probably not only by giving their gold and silver, but also their labour. The nobles of Tekoa were, indeed, exceptions, whose names are mentioned with disgrace, because "they put not their necks to the work of the Lord"—meaning, that the ox works by drawing with his yoke on his neck, but they would have no yoke; or, in other words, they refused in any way to afford aid, and did not care at all about their city. The daughters of Shallum, the ruler of the half part of Jerusalem, were also among those that assisted. Perhaps, in their zeal, they even found something personal to do; but, at all events, they aided in the purchase of many things that must have been needed.

While this work was going on, Sanballat, the governor of Samaria, was much mortified, and tried to stir up the army which he commanded; and he said, "What do these feeble Jews? will they fortify themselves? will they sacrifice? will they make an end in a day?"—meaning, perhaps, that, unless they made very great haste indeed, they would find that a stop should be put to their work. "Will they revive the stones out of the heaps of the rubbish which are burned?" And Tobiah, the Ammonite, joined him, and laughed at the idea of the Jews being able again to build up their wall with such rubbish as they had got: "Why," said he, "if a fox go up, it shall even break down their stone wall,"—it will not bear his weight.

This came to the ears of Nehemiah, who felt for the honour of his God; and he was grieved, and prayed to God to take notice of his adversaries, leaving it in his hands to do as he in his wisdom and justice should think right.

In the meantime the Jews proceeded so rapidly, that they soon carried up the wall all round the city, to half its proper height. Sanballat and his companions now found, that while they were mocking, the Jews were working, and when they had learned that they had really built so much, their sneerings were turned into rage: "they were very wroth." Then they "conspired all of





them together, to come and fight against Jerusalem, and to hinder it." And they thought that they would make no show of what they intended to do, but go cunningly to work, and they said, "They shall not know, neither see, till we come in the midst among them, and slay them, and cause the work to cease." So it is that bad men always try to prevent the doing of good things.

Nehemiah, however, still went on with the work, and while his adversaries threatened, he prayed. And as prayer without the use of proper precaution would only have been presumption, he also set a watch to give warning if the enemy should approach. Some of the men of Judah, indeed, seem to have been rather in fear that the enemy would succeed before the wall could be got up, for they said, "The strength of the bearer of burdens is decayed," through much labour in carrying heavy loads of stone and timber to the builders; "and there is much rubbish,"—a great deal more labouring work is yet to be done. The Jews, also, who dwelt near these Samaritans and their companions in opposition, brought very discouraging accounts of their intentions, and said "ten times," or, over and over again, as we should say—"Which way soever you move," you will have the enemy upon you; "from all places whence ye shall return unto us, they will be upon you."

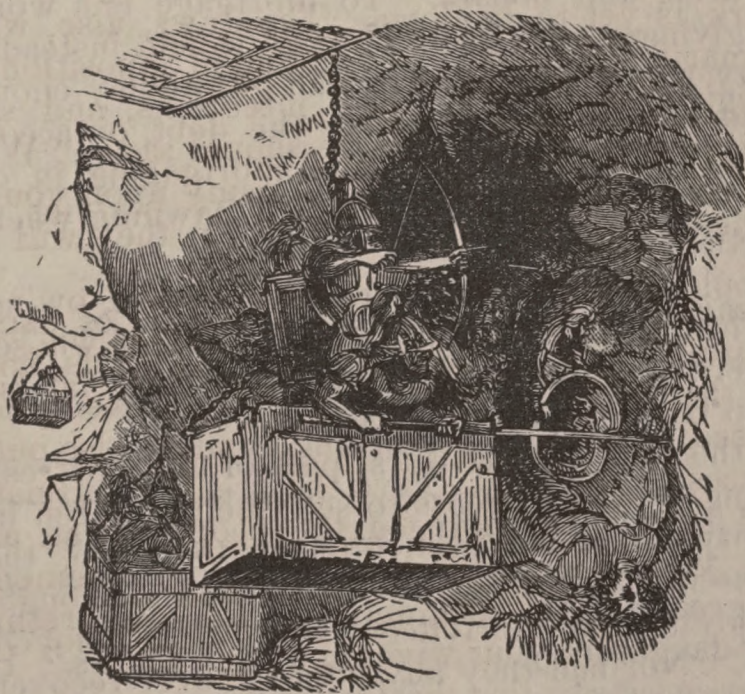
Nehemiah met all this increasing appearance of danger with increasing caution. He placed people with swords, spears, and bows behind the low walls, which might be attempted before they were raised to their proper height; and he also put men on the higher places or towers, to have the greater command of the enemy. And then he encouraged the people by an animating speech. "Be ye not afraid of them," said he, "remember the Lord, who is great and terrible, and fight for your brethren, your sons, and your daughters, your wives and your houses." However, when the adversaries saw that the Jews were aware of their intentions, they gave up the contest.

Nevertheless, Nehemiah did not give up his caution, for he knew that he had a bitter and a subtle foe to deal with. Some men were still kept ready for any conflict, and all worked with one





hand, and held a weapon with the other ; or, at least, had it close at hand, or girt about them ; and some of the more weighty weapons were committed to the care of others near at hand—the spears, the shields, the bows, and the habergeons, or breast-plates, or coats of mail. Nehemiah also appointed a trumpeter to stand by him, and if he should see any danger, or hear any alarm—as the workmen were divided a great way from each other, all around the city—this trumpeter could blow his trumpet, and call them all to the place where their help was needed. He also ordered all the people to continue in Jerusalem to guard it by night, as well as to work by day. Thus they went on with the work, and, that they might be ready to meet any attack, they never even pulled off their clothes, except when it was necessary to send them to be washed.





THE FIFTH CHAPTER OF NEHEMIAH.

Nehemiah's noble conduct towards the oppressed Jews.

‘Think upon me, my God, for good, according to all that I have done for this people.’—Ver. 19.

While Nehemiah was going on in his great work, many of the people, seeing his zeal for the good of his country, and relying on his wisdom and piety, flocked to him to make their complaints against their rich brethren of the Jews. These people had large families, and they were obliged to provide them with bread to keep them from starving. As there was a scarcity of corn, the rich had taken advantage of it to charge very high for what they had in their possession; and when the poorer people had no more money left to pay for it, they obliged them to mortgage their lands, vineyards, and houses. To mortgage is a word used to express the giving anything of value to be held instead of money, till the party who gives the thing can get money enough to pay the debt, and something more than the debt, on account of the delay in paying it. What is called mortgaging in dealings of this kind with houses and land, is called pawning when it relates to trifling articles only.

These people had also other heavy expenses, owing to a tax which they had to pay the Persian king, under whose authority they now were, and some had mortgaged their lands and vineyards to help them to pay this tax.

But even this was not the worst part of their distress. For the law permitting Jewish parents to sell their children in times of great necessity, they had been obliged to do so, though they loved them as well as the rich loved theirs, and though they had a right to enjoy the same privileges which they enjoyed, as a peculiar nation. Nor had they any hope of ever recovering them, as their lands and vineyards were not now in their hands to purchase their deliverance.

Then Nehemiah “was very angry,” as we may be at sin; for the rich men, by oppressing the poor, and exacting usury—that is, a





greater profit for the lending of their money than they ought to have had—had not only been cruel to their poor brethren, but had broken God's law, which forbade such conduct. And he rebuked the rich men; and he had them gathered together before a number of their countrymen; and he said to them, that he and his brethren in the Persian court had done all in their power to redeem any of their brethren who were sold to the heathen around them, in order that they might be restored again to their country, and would they now be so cruel to their own brethren? And must he, Nehemiah, and his companions, be obliged to pay them, to redeem their own countrymen and women?

To this they could answer nothing, for they felt ashamed. Then he told them that they ought to fear God more than to do such things in spite of his law, and even in the very face of the heathen. He, too, and his brethren who had laboured with him, might also make their claims, but they would not be so wicked as to oppress the poor. "I pray you then," said Nehemiah, "let us leave off this usury." Then he urged them to restore the lands, vineyards, olive-yards, and houses, and as much of the people's money as they had unjustly taken from them. So powerful are good words, connected with a good example, that the rich Jews could not help doing as Nehemiah desired; and then he called the priests to take the oaths of these men that they would keep their promise. After this, he shook his lap, according to an eastern custom,—that is, he took up the fore-skirts of his garments, and shaking the dust out of them, as a symbol, or sign, he said, "So God shake every man from his house, and from his labour, that performeth not his promise, even thus be he shaken out and emptied. And all the congregation said, Amen, and praised the Lord. And the people did according to this promise."

It is thought that Nehemiah remained a short time only at Jerusalem, till the building of the wall was completed, and some other things were arranged; and that, as he had asked permission from the king of Persia to be absent but for a short time, he therefore returned, and kept his word. When the king heard about what he had done, and the state of the people, it is supposed that he then sent Nehemiah back again, with full authority to be their





governor. For, in this chapter he says, that he was appointed to be governor in the land of Judah, from the twentieth year, even unto the two and thirtieth year of Artaxerxes the king, that is, twelve years; and that, during that time, neither he nor his brethren had ever eaten the bread of the governor. The table of the governor was always supplied by the people with bread and wine, and, besides, he had a daily allowance in money; but Nehemiah neither took salary nor bread. Nor did either he or his people make any profit, by purchasing the lands of the distressed poor. And as for doing the work of the wall, his own servants laboured as much as any others, but no charge was made for it. In addition to this liberality, Nehemiah kept a good table, which was open to a hundred and fifty guests, but he made no charge, "because the bondage was heavy upon the people." For all this he looked for reward from God only, not as if he had done any thing that could merit God's favour; but as God condescends to approve of what we do honestly in his sight, Nehemiah prayed, "Think upon me, my God, for good, according to all that I have done for **this** people."

THE SIXTH CHAPTER OF NEHEMIAH.

Artifices of Sanballat and his accomplices to ruin Nehemiah.

"My God, think thou upon Tobiah and Sanballat, according to these their works."—Ver. 14.

When Sanballat and his party heard that the wall of Jerusalem was completed, though, indeed, the gates of the city were not yet put up, they sent to Nehemiah, and invited him to meet them on a neighbouring plain, supposing, no doubt, that he would be ready to go, with a design to be reconciled to them. But this was not their design; and Nehemiah was either informed of their wicked plots, or God impressed his mind with a sufficient warning. So Nehemiah sent a civil answer, without giving any reason why





he would not go. His answer was, "I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down; why should the work cease, whilst I leave it and come down to you?" So he would not go down from the eminence on which Jerusalem stood, and expose himself to his treacherous enemies in the plain.

No less than four times did Sanballat and his companions contrive various methods to get Nehemiah to meet them, but he very wisely continued to give them similar answers. At last, Sanballat sent his servant with an open letter to him, which every one might read, and in which he told him that there was a report abroad that he was guilty of treason. This was the very way in which to spread such a report, and effect what he wanted—the ruin of good Nehemiah. Besides, this was a gross insult to a man of Nehemiah's rank, as letters sent to great men in the East are always carefully folded up, and put into a handsome silk bag, and then the bag is carefully sealed. The words of the letter were these:—"It is reported among the heathen, and Gashmu saith it (the same person as Geshem, the Arabian,) that thou and the Jews think to rebel: for which cause thou buildest the wall, that thou mayest be their king, according to these words. And thou hast also appointed prophets to preach of thee at Jerusalem, saying, There is a king in Judah: and now shall it be reported to the king according to these words. Come, now, therefore, and let us take counsel together." Nehemiah flatly replied to this message, that it was false, and that the whole was the invention of Sanballat himself.

Sanballat was not yet tired of doing mischief, so he thought of other schemes to accomplish his purpose. Alas! how persevering are the wicked in doing their evil deeds! let us be ashamed that we are not as much so in doing good, for we ought never to be weary in well-doing.

One Shemaiah, supposed to have been a priest, pretended great friendship to Nehemiah, and tried to persuade him to flee to some place of safety, that he might hide from his enemies; for, as they were so persevering, they would be sure to take him at last, and kill him. But Nehemiah replied, "Should such a man as I flee?" He was the king's agent, he was the leader of all the





work ; and, if he fled, the people would stop the work and flee too ; the enemy would then, most certainly, enter by the open gates, and Sanballat would assume the authority, and he and the Jews be involved in complete destruction. Nehemiah, indeed, perceived that God had not sent this man to save him from any danger ; God gave him wisdom to see that there was some artful design hid under his seeming friendship ; and so it turned out, for lo, the crafty Sanballat had hired him !

In the midst of such difficulties as these the wall was at last completed. So diligent were Nehemiah and the Jews, that the whole labour occupied only fifty-two days. Sanballat and the other adversaries were now ashamed and vexed, that all their efforts had been useless to prevent the work ; but who can hinder what God designs to be done ? And God was with Nehemiah to give him wisdom and courage, and to bless him.

Besides what has been stated, Tobiah, the Ammonite, had correspondence with some of the nobles among the Jews, who were so treacherous as to give him an account of all that was passing ; they had even bound themselves by oath to serve his cause, and betray their country, because there was some relationship between some of them and this man. Tobiah, too, had the audacity to send letters to Nehemiah to put him in fear.

THE SEVENTH AND EIGHTH CHAPTERS OF NEHEMIAH.

Nehemiah's wise measures to protect Jerusalem—The reading of the Law to all the people, and the keeping of the Feast of Tabernacles.

“ And when the seventh month came, the children of Israel were in their cities.”—Chap. vii. 73.

This chapter is supposed to relate to what Nehemiah did just before he returned to the Persian court, and so before he was appointed governor of the people. He made Hanani, the person who first told him of the sad state of Jerusalem, and Hananiah,





rulers during his absence. Some seem to think that both these names mean but one person, who is described as "a faithful man," and one that "feared God above many." All rulers ought to be men that fear God, that they may set a good example to others; but all are not so.

He also ordered that the gates of Jerusalem should be kept shut every morning, till the sun became hot; that is, till it was likely there were plenty of people risen to defend the city from any attempts to enter it by the gates. A similar custom is still to be found among the inhabitants in the parts of the world about Judea; for travellers inform us, that if a traveller arrives after sun-set he finds the gates shut, and on no consideration will they open them till the next morning, so that those who come late are obliged to lodge in the plain. Nehemiah further desired, that care should be taken to see that the gates were kept closed, and that proper persons should be always on the watch to prevent surprise from their enemies.

Jerusalem had not yet recovered its inhabitants. The city was still as large as it was when it was full of people, but the people who returned from the captivity in Babylon, had not all taken up their abode there, "and the houses were not builded." The number that came out of captivity with Zerubbabel did indeed amount to forty-two thousand three hundred and sixty, and many more came with Ezra. Yet, a great number chose to settle in the towns and cities in the country, Jerusalem being in such a desolate condition. So Nehemiah says, "My God put into mine heart to gather together the nobles, and the rulers, and the people, that they might be reckoned by genealogy. And I found a register of them which came up at the first, and found written therein, These are the children of the promise, that went out of the captivity." This register directed Nehemiah to find out to what city each family formerly belonged, and who to the city of Jerusalem, "that they might be called upon to come and rebuild their houses, and take up their residence there."

Nehemiah then gives us an account of the children of the province of Judea as it was now reduced, who came out of the captivity of Babylon through the decree of Cyrus. He also tells us





of the liberality of those who subscribed well for rebuilding the city and the temple; and he concludes by informing us, that in a short time, the children of Israel got all fixed in their own cities.

And now we read of a grand assembly of the people, which took place in the open street, because, probably, there was no place large enough to hold them; and that there, Ezra, at the request of the people, read the law of the Lord aloud, "from the morning until mid-day, before the men and the women, and those that could understand; and the ears of all the people were attentive unto the book of the law." This was a most serious meeting. The people all stood up to show respect, "Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God," who had given them his holy law, "and all the people answered Amen, Amen, with lifting up their hands, and they bowed their heads and worshipped the Lord, with their faces to the ground."

There were many others who stood by the side of Ezra, and who most likely sometimes helped him by reading a few portions while he rested; for, reading so long in the open air, to so great a number of people, must have fatigued him very much. These also, as well as Ezra, explained such parts as the people could not easily understand.

The people were so much affected, that they all wept when they heard the words of the law, remembering how much they had broken it. And Nehemiah, the Tirshatha, or governor, "and Ezra, the priest, the scribe, and the Levites, that taught the people, said unto all the people, This day is holy unto the Lord your God; mourn not, nor weep." It seems that this meeting was on the feast of trumpets, which was kept on the first day of the Jews' seventh month; and, as that was usually a day of joy, it was not keeping it aright to show sadness. So Nehemiah said unto them, "Go your way, eat the fat, and drink the sweet, and send portions unto them for whom nothing is prepared: for this day is holy unto our Lord: neither be ye sorry; for the joy of the Lord is your strength." In other words, Nehemiah told the people to go home, for, after standing so long, they must want rest; and to





eat not merely a common meal, but to make a feast of joy of the best provisions; and as many of the poor could get but little food, they must give to them that they might share in their pleasure. Thus all would be made happy, both those who gave and those who received; and if they did all out of gratitude and obedience to God, they would be strengthened, not only in body, but also in soul. So all the people did as they were ordered to do, and were happy.

On the second day the chiefs of the fathers, or heads of the families and tribes, made further inquiries of Ezra, about the meaning of many parts of the law. "And they found written in the law which the Lord had commanded to Moses, that the children of Israel should dwell in booths in the feast of the seventh month; and that they should publish and proclaim in all their cities, and in Jerusalem, saying, Go forth unto the mount, and fetch olive branches, and pine branches, and myrtle branches, and palm branches, and branches of thick trees, to make booths, as it is written;" that is, as it is written in the twenty-third chapter of Leviticus, and the fortieth verse.

You will recollect, my dear young reader, that all this was ordered to be done for the purpose of keeping the *Feast of Tabernacles*, which was held to keep in remembrance the travelling life of the Israelites in the wilderness, after they had been delivered from Egyptian slavery. Now, having been delivered from the Babylonish captivity, and the proper time of the year occurring, it was their special duty to keep the same feast.

So the people fetched the boughs, "and made themselves booths, every one upon the roof of his house, and in their courts, and in the courts of the house of God, and in the street of the water-gate, and in the street of the gate of Ephraim. And all the congregation of them that were come again out of the captivity made booths, and sat under the booths," during the seven days that the feast lasted, to remind them how their fathers dwelt in booths in the wilderness. Indeed, "since the days of Jeshua," or Joshua, "the son of Nun, unto that day, had not the children of Israel done so." Joshua observed the feast when he had brought and settled the people of Israel in the land of Canaan; and it had been





observed since, but no Feast of Tabernacles had been so heartily and so piously celebrated.

THE NINTH, TENTH, AND ELEVENTH CHAPTERS OF NEHEMIAH.

A solemn Fast of the Jews—The People make a Covenant to serve God—A tenth of the Inhabitants of the Land go to live in Jerusalem to people it.

“And the seed of Israel separated themselves from all strangers, and stood and confessed their sins, and the iniquities of their fathers.”—Chap. ix. 2.

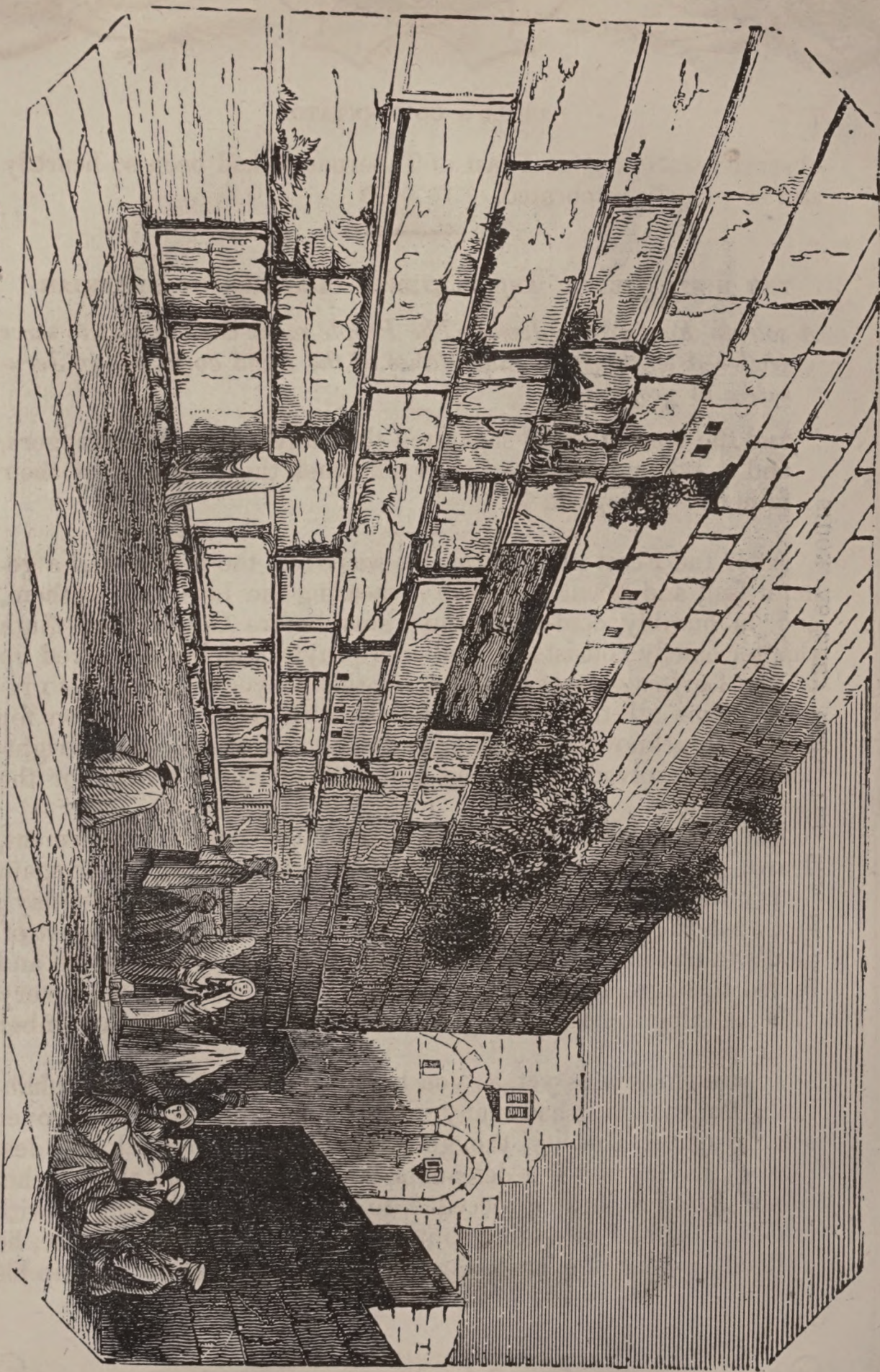
After the Feast of Tabernacles was over, the people had a general fast, and spent six hours in hearing the law read to them, and in humbly confessing their sins before God. The ninth chapter chiefly consists of a solemn prayer which was offered up by the Levites on this occasion. In this prayer they called to remembrance all the dealings of God with them as a nation for ages past, acknowledged their faults, owned that God was righteous, and resolved on serving him with all their hearts, for the time to come.

For this purpose, they had a solemn covenant, or agreement, drawn up, in which they promised that they would never again marry the heathen; that they would keep holy the Sabbath-day; and that they would provide for the continuance and support of God's ministers and ordinances among them. A few signed and sealed this agreement for the rest, for it would have been a very difficult thing to have managed it otherwise for so large a number of people.

Jerusalem was as yet, as you have been told, but thinly inhabited; for, though it had many inhabitants, they were spread over a large space. The city, though walled round, was weak and despicable, having but few defenders, compared with its size. Nehemiah, therefore, next proceeded to take steps for filling it with inhabitants; and so adding to its strength. For this purpose, he obliged one out of every ten of the country people to take up his



JEW'S' PLACE OF WAILING AT THE OLD TERRACE WALL OF THE TEMPLE.





SIDON. AS SEEN FROM THE SEA SHORE.



abode there; and that there might be no partiality shown, in favouring any who might find it more convenient to live where they had already got comfortable houses, he advised that every ten should cast lots, and he on whom the lot fell should go and live at Jerusalem. Some, indeed, went there of their own accord; and as it was then a place with but few advantages, and exposed to great dangers, the inhabitants blessed and prayed for them, for showing so much love to their poor city.

THE TWELFTH AND THIRTEENTH CHAPTERS OF NEHEMIAH.

The Dedication of the Wall of Jerusalem—Nehemiah completes the Reform of the Jews.

“Also that day they offered great sacrifices and rejoiced; for God had made them rejoice with great joy; the wives also and children rejoiced; so that the joy of Jerusalem was heard even afar off.”—Chap. xii. 43.

The chief thing contained in the twelfth chapter is the account of the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem.

The wall having been built, the princes, priests, and people, were all gathered together, to express their joy at its completion, and to thank God. This was the most sure way of securing its protection and defence in all future dangers. Then they all walked round it in two companies, singing psalms and sounding trumpets, and other musical instruments, in different ways, one taking the right, and the other the left; till, at last, they met again at one point. The walls being thick, the princes and priests, with the singers, could walk comfortably upon them; and it is probable that the people walked round below, some within the wall, and some without. All that day they offered great sacrifices; and not only were the men engaged, but also the women and children partook of the general joy. The hosannas of infants are not despised, when they offer them from their hearts to God.





Nehemiah, having been called to the court of his royal master was some time absent from Jerusalem; and on his return to see how things went on, he was greatly grieved to find that many wicked things had been done. Eliashib, the chief priest having formed an alliance by marriage with Tobiah, the Ammonite, which was contrary to the law of God, and wishing to accommodate him in the city, had even given him a place in the sacred temple. Out of several little chambers which had been used for keeping stores to support the Levites, he had made one grand apartment for this heathen man. This was setting a bad example to the people, profaning the courts of God's house, and injuring the portion of the priests, and was in direct opposition to God's law, which declared "that the Ammonite and the Moabite should not come into the congregation of God for ever. Because they met not the children of Israel with bread and with water, but hired Balaam against them, that he should curse them."

Nehemiah very speedily turned out every thing belonging to this wicked Ammonite: and had the chamber well cleansed, as a sign of washing away its defilement from his footsteps; and he replaced the vessels of the house of God, and other things which had before been kept there for sacred uses.

Then he found out that the Levites had been neglected, and the people cared so little about religion, that not having provided for them, as God had commanded, they had all left the city, and gone into the fields to work for themselves. He also soon remedied this evil, and brought back the Levites, and made the people bring their tithes of corn, wine, and oil, into their treasuries.

There being no regard paid to religion, the Holy Sabbath was shamefully abused. God had commanded it to be kept as a holy day, and that no manner of work should be done in it; but, on that day they worked their wine-presses, to squeeze out the juice of the grapes for the purpose of making wine; and they carried their corn, and loaded their asses, and traded with the men of Tyre, who were a sort of pedlars, having many wares to sell. Nehemiah reproved all this sin, and especially the nobles, who ought to have used their authority to prevent it; and he reminded them that because their fathers had sinned in the like way, they





their children had so long been suffering, and that this was like asking God to punish them again for their iniquity. To prevent any more trading on the Sabbath, he ordered the gates of Jerusalem to be shut from the evening before the Sabbath, till the morning after; and, as he could not trust the faithless men who had been porters at the gates, he set his own people to keep them, that no one should enter the city on the Sabbath, with any merchandize about him. The Tyrian traders did not like to be balked in their dealings, and lounged about outside the walls on the Sabbath-day, hoping to entice some of the people to go out of the city, and to deal with them. However, Nehemiah was as sharp as they; and, seeing what they were about, he told them, "if ye do so again, I will lay hands on you!" and this frightened them so, that they did not come any more on the Sabbath.

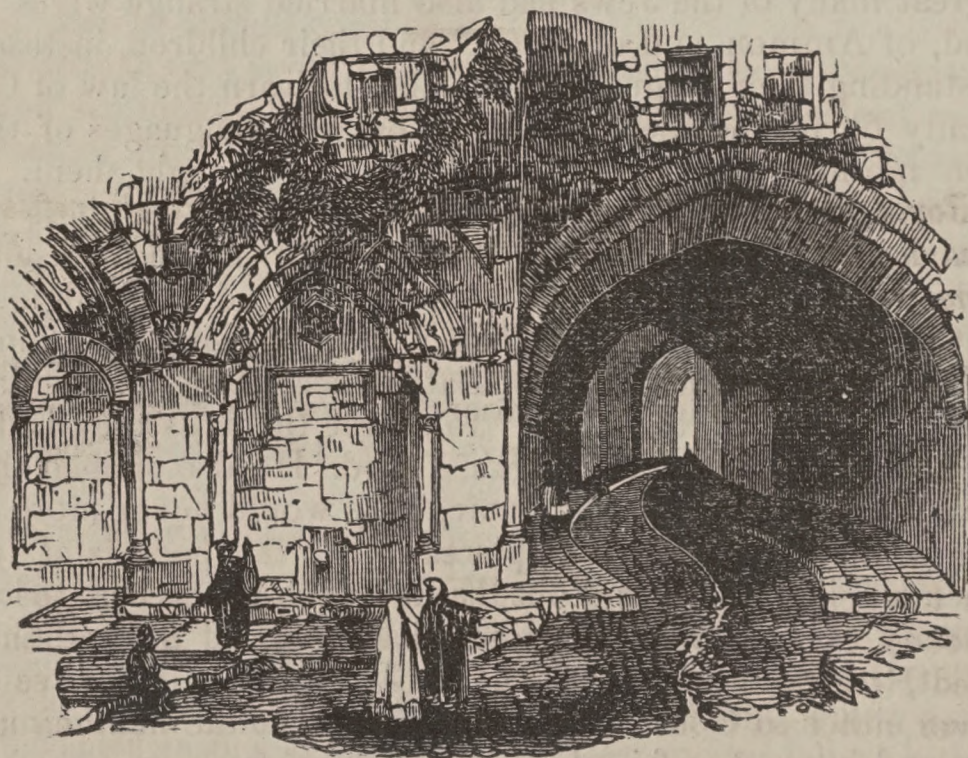
A great many of the Jews had also married strange wives "of Ashdod, of Ammon, and of Moab," and their children, instead of understanding their language, to be able to learn the law of God, were only fit for heathen, and knew but the languages of their heathen mothers and nurses, which they had taught them. So these Jews would be the fathers of idolaters. With these men Nehemiah also contended, when they tried to excuse themselves. And he "cursed them;" that is, he denounced the judgments which God had spoken against them; and "he smote certain of them," or ordered them to be beaten, according to the law; and "he plucked off their hair," to shame them, as they had no shame in sinning thus openly against God. He also obliged them to swear, that, for the time to come, they would never more suffer any such marriages to take place.

Nehemiah, likewise, found out that a branch of the high priest's own family—one of his grandsons—had married a daughter of Sanballat, that notorious enemy of the Jews. How little love had that man either to God or his country, who could make himself in duty and interest, a friend to him that was a sworn enemy to both! It seems this young priest would not put away his wife, and therefore Nehemiah chased him from him—deprived him, degraded him, and made him for ever incapable of the priesthood.





Thus did Nehemiah reform and benefit his countrymen, the Jews, and aim to promote the honour and glory of his God ; looking only for his reward in heaven. This is what he meant when he so often prayed, "Remember me, O my God, concerning this." For God does not forget what we do for his glory, though it is our duty to do it, though what we can do is but little, and though he has no need of our services for his own benefit, but all the benefit belongs to ourselves. Young reader ! "only fear the Lord, and serve him," and he will be sure in his mercy to remember you "for good."



ARCHED STREET IN JERUSALEM.





CHILD'S COMMENTATOR.

THE BOOK OF ESTHER,

OR, THE

HISTORY OF A JEWISH CAPTIVE, WHO WAS MADE QUEEN
OF PERSIA, AND SAVED THE LIVES OF THE JEWS.

THE FIRST CHAPTER OF ESTHER.

The Royal Feast of King Ahasuerus—Queen Vashti refuses to show herself to his nobles and princes—The King's Decree depriving the Queen of her dignity.

“But the queen Vashti refused to come at the king's commandment by his chamberlains; therefore was the king very wroth, and his anger burned in him.”—Ver. 12.

THE wonderful history which we have in this book is of events which happened in the time of Ezra, and Ahasuerus, the king mentioned, is, by some, supposed to have been Xerxes, the renowned Persian conqueror. The Bible, as I have before said, is, however, not particular in informing us about the heathen kings, whose names would never have been mentioned there, had they not happened to have a share in some part of the Jewish history. The Old Testament is the history of the Jews only,—the people whom God favoured, and among whom his worship was preserved in the world, when all the other people of it were





idolaters. Ahasuerus being a common name given by ancient authors to Persian kings, the Scripture has not particularly shown which king of them it was; it was enough for the interesting parts of this history, to know that it happened with a Persian king.

We here learn that this prince reigned over an hundred and twenty-seven provinces, or large tracts of country, managed by different governors.

Ahasuerus had a palace in Shushan, the chief Persian city.

In the third year of his reign he made a grand feast for all the nobles and princes who governed his hundred and twenty-seven provinces. This feast lasted "an hundred and fourscore," that is, an hundred and eighty days, and, after it was over, he gave a feast to all the attendants in his palace, which lasted seven days.

It is said, that it is still the custom in Persia to keep a yearly feast for the same time; for in that country, the manners and customs of the people have not changed as they have with us. It is supposed, that in this second feast, many thousands were entertained; so splendid and expensive are the feasts of the rich Persians.

On such occasions it was customary, and probably is now, to hang the place about with rich curtains of various colours, and Ahasuerus had hangings of white, green, and blue, "fastened with cords of fine linen and purple, to silver rings," for them to be drawn by, and "pillars of marble" at each end, to support them. "The beds,"—or rather couches, on which the guests sat or leaned while eating, according to the custom of the Eastern people,— "had their legs made of gold, and their feet of silver, and were, likewise, covered with gold and silver cloth; and the floors were paved with beautiful marbles of different colours, red and blue, and white and black." The guests also drank out of gold cups, and had as much wine as they would drink. The king, however, did not urge any to take more than they liked, so that if any went away not sober, it was their own fault so to disgrace themselves.

In the Eastern countries, the women never mingle with the men,





as they do with us ; hence the queen Vashti—or beautiful, which Vashti means—and the ladies, had a grand feast by themselves, at the same time also, in the royal house.

After the feast had lasted seven days, Ahasuerus was talking with his nobles about the beauty of his queen ; and, that he might convince them how handsome she was, he sent some of his officers to fetch Vashti and show her to the company. Vashti was either too proud to allow herself to be shown before a set of nobles and strangers, who perhaps were scarcely sober,—or, very likely, she was so modest that she would rather run the risk of displeasing the king, than join for a moment such a large company of wine-drinkers, all being men. Had she been vain of her beauty, she would no doubt have gone to display it, but she seems to have had more good sense and decency.

If the king had had as much good sense left, he would have praised her for her virtue, and for her proper sense of decorum, in not letting herself down as a queen ; but his wine had deprived him of his wit, and made him stupid. When a man has drunk too much wine, he is also often put easily into a passion—and, on being told that the queen would not come, the king was in a great rage.

So he directly consulted his wise men, or counsellors, that knew the laws, and asked what he should do with Vashti for not obeying his commands. One of them, named Memucan, said, that the queen had not only insulted the king, but had set a bad example to the ladies of the whole kingdom, who, if Vashti were not punished, would never mind what their husbands wished them to do. He, therefore, thought that the king should separate himself from Vashti for ever, and choose another queen. This Memucan then advised the king to write a decree to that purport, and to send it all over the kingdom. Now, when the king had written a law, according to the custom of the Medes and Persians, he could not alter it, and so, when he had done this, Vashti could never again be queen. This is thought to have been very cunning advice in Memucan, for, if the king had not made the decree, he might have restored Vashti to favour, and then she would have punished her enemies for trying to deprive her of her dignity





"And the saying pleased the king and the princes, and the king did according to the word of Memucan."

THE SECOND CHAPTER OF ESTHER.

Esther made Queen of Persia—Plot against the King.

"So Esther was taken unto king Ahasuerus, into his house royal, in the tenth month, which is the month Tebeth, in the seventh year of his reign."—Ver. 16.

When King Ahasuerus got sober, and his anger no longer raged, he began to think how foolish he had been to be offended with his queen. And he "remembered Vashti," and how much he loved her, and "what she had done,"—only having committed a small offence, if any offence at all—"and what was decreed against her"—that she should lose her rank, and that without hope of recovery.

In order to soothe the king's mind, and take away his thoughts from Vashti, his counsellors advised him to appoint officers all over the kingdom to look out all the beautiful women they could find, and to send them to one of the king's chief officers, called his chamberlain; and he should take care that they should be properly perfumed and dressed fit to see a king of the East; and then the one that the king liked best should be his queen.

At this time God's providence so ordered it, that there happened to be "a certain Jew, whose name was Mordecai," residing in the king's palace at Shushan. He was a great-grandson of Kish, one of those whom Nebuchadnezzar had carried away captive into Babylon. "And he brought up Hadassah, that is, Esther, his uncle's daughter, for she had neither father nor mother; and the maid was fair and beautiful, whom Mordecai, when her father and mother were dead, took for his own daughter." Hadassah was the original name of this Jewess, and means myrtle; and Esther was the Persian name given to her, which signifies a star, because she was a shining beauty.





When Hegai, the keeper of the women, saw this Jewess, he was pleased with her ; and so, indeed, were all who saw her ; not only because she was beautiful, but because she was contented and happy, and “required nothing but what Hegai, the king’s chamberlain, the keeper of the women, appointed.” Esther, however, took care not to say she was a Jewess, for her uncle Mordecai advised her to keep that a secret, lest she should be despised for it.

After the ceremony of twelve months’ preparation, the king saw all the women that had been gathered from different parts of the kingdom, and “the king loved Esther above all the women, and she obtained grace and favour in his sight more than all the virgins,” or unmarried women ; “so that he set the royal crown upon her head,” and made her queen instead of Vashti. And “then the king made a great feast unto all his princes and servants, even Esther’s feast ;” which some think lasted as long as a month ; “and he made a release to the provinces,” that is, he would not take the taxes which the conquered provinces owed him up to the time ; “and gave gifts according to the state of the king,” or suitable to his grandeur, Esther sharing of them largely, as Eastern queens usually did.

Mordecai got now to be appointed one of the officers in the service of the king, which he probably obtained through Esther, though she had not yet explained her relationship to him. While he was performing his duties, he found out that Bigthan and Teresh, two officers who kept the door of the king’s bed-chamber, had laid a plan to kill Ahasuerus, with whom they were angry for something he had done to them. Mordecai, like a faithful servant, immediately let Esther know of the scheme, and Esther directly told it to the king, and informed him how she knew about it through Mordecai. So inquiry being instantly made, the whole plot was discovered, and the two chamberlains were hanged, after which an account of the traitors, and of their discovery and execution, was written in a book of the history of the country, which was kept for the use of the king.





THE THIRD CHAPTER OF ESTHER.

Haman's Exaltation, and Plan to destroy the Jews.

"Haman sought to destroy all the Jews that were throughout the whole kingdom of Ahasuerus."—Ver. 6.

After the marriage of Esther, and the discovery of the conspiracy against Ahasuerus, the king promoted "Haman, the son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, and advanced him, and set his seat above all the princes that were with him." This man was, therefore, a very great favourite at court; for it was the custom of the kings of Persia to advance those to the highest seats they thought best deserved it. And all the king's servants "bowed and revered Haman, for the king had so commanded concerning him: but Mordecai bowed not, nor did him reverence." It is thought by some that this reverence was more than that respect which one person pays to another, and especially which the lower ranks pay to those above them; and that Haman was honoured with a sort of adoration which ought alone to be given to God. Had it been mere respect that he wanted, Mordecai would certainly not have been so destitute of common decorum as not to have paid it to him at the command of the king; but if he wanted honours which ought to be given to God only, Mordecai, as a devout Jew, would not be guilty of such base idolatry.

The other servants of the king took notice of the conduct of Mordecai, and talked to him about it; and at last they told Haman, that he might take particular notice of him; and especially as Mordecai was a Jew, and the more likely to excite his displeasure by his disobedience. Mordecai had, indeed, told them of what race he was, probably as a reason why he did not act as they did.

When Haman saw how Mordecai behaved, he was "full of wrath;" but as it was beneath his dignity to notice the insult of such a person, he resolved on taking a dreadful vengeance on all the Jewish people in Persia. Revenge is sweet to wicked people





while good people are ready to pardon even their most bitter enemies. Haman would here slay the innocent with the guilty, to gratify his revenge; and, by killing all the Jews, he supposed that he should get rid of a people who would be likely to copy the example of Mordecai, and show him the same kind of indifference; and, that by making so terrible an example, the whole kingdom would in future be afraid to mention his very name but with honour.

The heathen nations of old were like many of them now, and had a notion that certain days of the year, and certain signs, were lucky; and so they would not undertake any great thing till their luck should come. In order to fix upon a lucky day, Haman's people cast lots before him, as many people throw dice, draw cards, or toss up half-pence, to decide about any thing, particularly in certain games. God, with whom is the luck of every thing, and who alone regulates all things to bring about his own glory at last, so ordered it, that while these lots were cast from month to month, the lucky day was delayed for a full year; for it did not seem to turn up till "the twelfth month." Haman's disposition towards the Jews being known, they had, therefore, sufficient time to pray to God, and to determine what to do.

Having determined the time for executing his plan, Haman complained to the king that there was a certain people spread all about the provinces, who disobeyed the king's laws, and that it was dangerous to allow them to live. He, therefore, advised that the king should decree their destruction; and to make up for the loss of so many people who payed him tribute, he, Haman, was willing to pay a large sum out of his own purse. This man must have made great riches at court, for the sum he offered to pay was 'ten thousand talents of silver,' making about twenty millions of dollars of our money! It is, however, probable that he reckoned on having a large portion of the spoil of the Jews, notwithstanding that all the murderers were allowed to share it among them, according to the decree which the king now issued. Haman was so great a favourite with the king that he absolutely refused to take his money, and he granted all he desired to the fullest extent.

So on the thirteenth day of the first month, Haman called





together all the king's scribes, or secretaries, and ordered them to write letters to the officers and governors of all the provinces, in the characters and languages of their different nations, and these letters were signed and sealed with the king's ring. As soon as they were ready, they were sent by posts, or running-men, into all parts where the Jews were. The decree which they contained, was of the most cruel kind. It gave orders that on one particular day—the thirteenth day of the twelfth month—they were “to destroy, to kill, and to cause to perish, all Jews, both young and old, little children and women,” “and to take the spoil of them for a prey.” Heralds, or royal criers, were also appointed to proclaim the decree, that every body might be ready to execute it, and share in the booty.

After these things were done, the king and Haman feasted together; the royal city was, however, only a scene of distress; for the Jews were numerous there, and their grief affected their friends and neighbours, who were more humane than Haman, and trembled at the thought of shedding so much innocent blood.

THE FOURTH, FIFTH, SIXTH, AND SEVENTH CHAPTERS OF ESTHER.

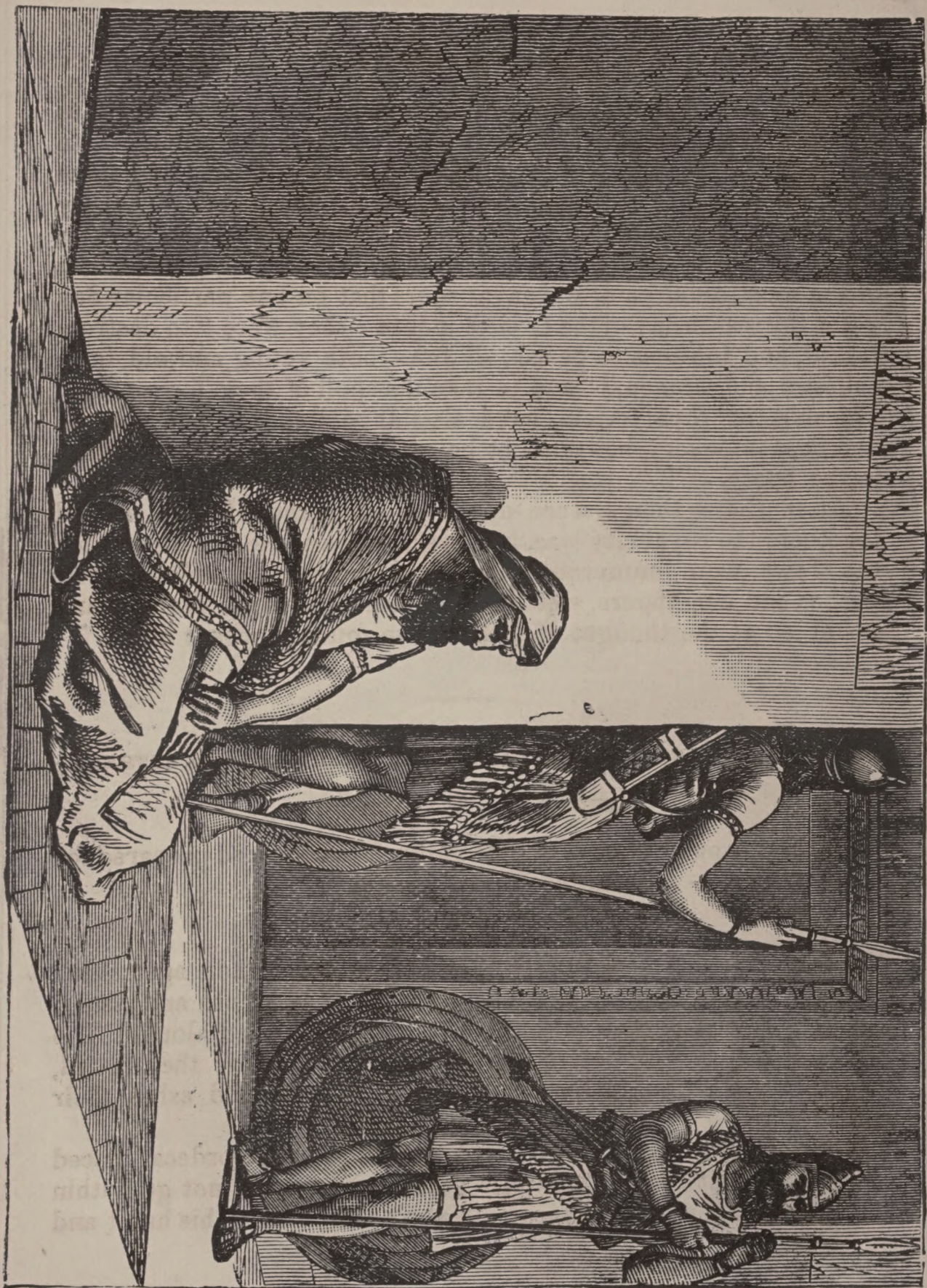
Haman's fall and Execution.

“So they nanged Haman on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai.”—Chap. vii. 10.

Mordecai soon heard of the decree that was made against his people, and he rent his clothes, and put on sackcloth and ashes, as signs of grief, and went out into the city and cried aloud. The Jews in all the provinces showed the same grief; they fasted, wept, wailed, and many even made sackcloth and ashes their beds.

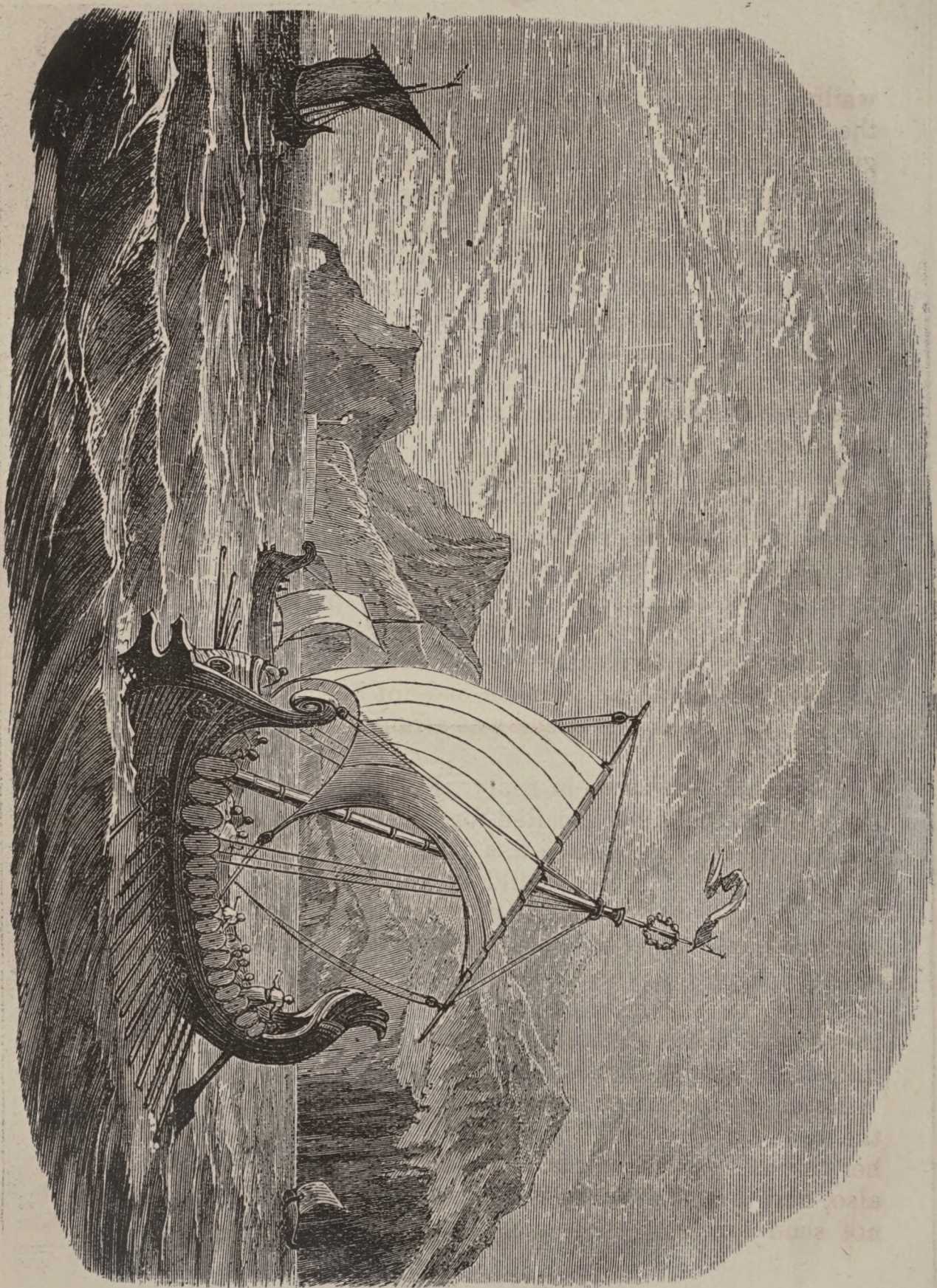
That Esther might know what was going on, Mordecai placed himself at last before the king's gate; for he durst not go within the walls of the court in sackcloth and ashes. Here his habit and





MORDECAI IN THE KING'S GATE.

SAILING UNDER CYPRUS, ANCIENT SHIPS.





wailing attracted the notice of some of the court, and came to the knowledge of Esther's maids, who told her of this singular appearance of Mordecai. The queen immediately sent him some fresh clothing to appear at court, when she might know more of the cause of his grief. Mordecai, however, refused the clothing. Esther then sent for Hatach, one of the king's chamberlains, who waited upon her, and desired him to go to Mordecai and find out what was the matter. Mordecai told him all the particulars about Haman, and sent a copy of the decree to the queen, and charged her to lose no time in seeing the king, and asking for the preservation of their people, the Jews.

Now, there was a law in Persia, which made it death for any person to go in to the king without being sent for; this was to keep up his dignity, and to prevent any person from taking away his life. Esther, therefore, although queen of Persia, must run a great risk to venture into the king's presence, without being sent for; and being now but coolly treated by the king, the hazard of incurring his displeasure was great. Esther, therefore, sent a message to Mordecai, that she had not been called in to the king for thirty days, and that she was afraid to venture as a petitioner before him.

Mordecai sent word in reply, that if her life was in danger by going in to the king uncalled for, it was more in danger by her not going. For the decree was made to destroy the Jewish nation, and as Haman perhaps would begin at the palace, even her life would not be spared, though she was queen. He also hoped that she was raised to the crown by Providence for the very purpose of saving her nation; but if she neglected to use her influence with the king, he felt persuaded that God would yet save the people, though she and her family, as a punishment for her indifference, might probably perish.

Esther then desired that Mordecai should gather together all the Jews that were in Shushan, and they should fast and pray for her three days and nights, while she and her maidens would fast also, and then she would venture before the king, though he might not send for her; and, said she, "If I perish, I perish; God's





will be done." "So Mordecai went his way, and did according to all that Esther had commanded him."

On the third day of the fast, when it was finished, Esther threw off her mourning dress and put on her royal robes, and she went and stood in the inner court of the king's house, where none were admitted uncalled for, on pain of death. The king was seated on his royal throne; and when he saw her, her modesty and beauty touched his heart; and he held out his golden sceptre, which was the sign that she might approach him, instead of being put to death, for venturing into his presence. Esther touched the top of the sceptre, as a token of her obedience. The king then said very kindly to her, "What wilt thou, queen Esther? and what is thy request? it shall be given thee, to the half of the kingdom." Not that he would have given her half his kingdom, but he meant, 'Any thing that you want, I am sure I will most readily do for you: so do not be afraid to ask.'

She then asked the king to come and partake of a banquet with her, and likewise to let Haman share the feast. She thought that would be the best way to lay her grievances before the king, and that she could then accuse Haman to his face, when he could have no time to prepare words for defence.

"So the king and Haman came to the banquet that Esther had prepared." And while he was drinking wine, he remembered his promise to the queen, and desired her to let him know what she wished him to do.

Esther was perhaps yet timid, or was trying to win upon the king sufficiently to allow her to attack his favourite Haman with success. She therefore still put off making her request, but begged the king to favour her once more with his presence, and she would on the next day prepare another banquet for him and Haman.

Haman went away quite delighted with his honours; but his proud heart was yet unhappy, because, as he passed the king's gate, Mordecai would not do him reverence. However he said nothing to him, but treasured up his malice for a better opportunity. As soon as he got home he was full of joy at his good





fortune at court, and he sent to invite his particular friends, and his wife and all his children, to tell them of his great prosperity. "And Haman told them of the glory of his riches, and the multitude of his children, and all the things wherein the king had promoted him, and how he had advanced him above the princes and servants of the king. Haman said, moreover, Yea, Esther the queen did let no man come in with the king unto the banquet which she had prepared but myself; and to-morrow am I invited unto her also with the king." But still, said he, "all this availeth me nothing, so long as I see Mordecai, the Jew, sitting at the king's gate;" how great soever my joy, in all my honours, I have a mortification that spoils all, and whenever I think of it, I cannot endure it; there is that Jew, Mordecai, who will not pay me homage as others do; I shall not be fully happy, till he is put out of the way.

Now, you know, Haman might easily have put him out of the way, for he had got the king's decree passed against him and his people; but by waiting for his supposed lucky day, he lost his present opportunity, and so Mordecai remained to humble his pride.

"Oh," said Zeresh his wife, and all his friends, "there is a very short way of finishing the matter with that Jew; get a very high gallows made, and then ask the king's leave to-morrow, to hang Mordecai at once; and when that is done, you can go to the banquet free from all vexation." Haman liked the notion, and got the gallows made to hang Mordecai.

On the night before the banquet, the king was very restless, and, being unable to sleep, he ordered the Chronicles, or notes of what happened in the kingdom, to be brought and read to him for his amusement. In those Chronicles, you remember, were entered the names of the conspirators against the king, whom Mordecai had discovered, and the account of Mordecai's fidelity, and of their treachery and execution. It happened that the courtiers fell in with this passage, and read it. The king then asked, if any reward had ever been bestowed upon Mordecai for his noble conduct in saving his life. The lords of his bed-chamber replied, that nothing had been done for him to raise him above his usual place.





The king was resolved that such conduct should no longer pass unrewarded, and asked his lords if any of his attendants were in the outward court, waiting to be called in. On going to see, they found Haman there, who had come as soon as he could, with a secret intention to obtain the king's leave to hang Mordecai. So the king desired him to enter. As soon as he had entered, the king said to him, "What shall be done unto the man whom the king delighteth to honour? Now Haman thought in his heart, to whom would the king delight to do honour, more than to myself?" he being the king's greatest favourite. So, he very readily suggested honours, which he thought he should enjoy. And he said, "Let the royal apparel be brought which the king useth to wear, and the horse that the king rideth upon, and the crown royal which is set upon his head. And let this apparel and horse be delivered to the hands of one of the king's most noble princes, that they may array the man withal whom the king delighteth to honour, and bring him on horseback through the street of the city, and proclaim before him, Thus shall it be done unto the man whom the king delighteth to honour." The whole of this request amounts to this. Haman proposed that the man should wear the king's purple robe, which was a daring proposal, for it was a capital crime with the Persians to wear any of the king's apparel; but supposing that the honours would be his, and, that being so great a favourite he might make free with the king, his ambition led him to this bold suggestion. It was equally forbidden that any man should ride the king's horse, much less wear his crown; and it is thought, therefore, that he intended the horse should only be led and not ridden, and that the crown should be put not on the head of the man but of the horse, which was a custom in Persia in some state processions. The honour would be great to wear the king's robe, and be attended by his horse bearing his crown. The ambition of Haman would give us reason to believe that he would as readily have asked to ride the king's horse and to wear his crown, as to put on his royal robe; but as the Persian customs admit of a different explanation, I have named it; and it is not improbable that Haman meant, that the king's horse, wearing the crown on his head, should be led before the man whom the





king delighted to honour, and that the honoured man should ride upon another horse, led by a prince.

The king liked the proposal of Haman, and told him directly to do as he had proposed—to whom? Why to Mordecai, the Jew; to the very man whom he had come to court to get hanged!

Here pause a moment, young reader. Do you think that all this was chance? No; God ordered it all for the good of his favoured people, the Jews. If Mordecai had not discovered the conspirators against the king—if the king's rest had not been disturbed—if he had not taken it into his head to have the Chronicles read to him, where Mordecai's good conduct was recorded—if Mordecai had been rewarded before—this remarkable honour would not have been bestowed upon Mordecai at all. So that it depended upon a chain of events all ordered by God's providence. And then, mark! the honour was granted him just at the moment when he was in the most danger, and when his life was about to be demanded by Haman, to whom the king would no doubt have granted it, having forgotten all about Mordecai's having saved his life from traitors. And what was yet more extraordinary, the man who was about to destroy him, was the man who was made to load him with honours! So Mordecai lost nothing by faithfully serving God; neither will you lose at last by serving him. "Verily, there is a reward for the righteous."

Haman, having obeyed the king's command, and honoured the man who would not worship him, went home bitterly mortified, being disappointed in his vengeance, and thinking himself degraded while Mordecai was exalted. Instead of repeating the story of his greatness, he now told his wife and friends of his misfortune, and they could not console him. They had probably heard how God had often done wonders in behalf of the Jews, and knowing Haman's rage against them, and his intentions towards them, they now saw that, already, ill success attended him; and they said, "If Mordecai be of the seed of the Jews, before whom thou hast begun to fall, thou shalt not prevail against him, but shalt surely fall before him."

While they were talking, the king's chamberlains came to attend





Haman to the banquet, and, with a heavy heart, he hastened to join the king and queen.

While they were feasting, the king again asked Esther—which was the third time he had put the question—"What is thy petition, queen Esther, and it shall be granted thee? and what is thy request, and it shall be performed, even to the half of the kingdom?" The queen then told him that she had asked for her life, and for the lives of all her nation under the king's dominion, for they were all devoted to destruction. She intimated that if they had been doomed to be slaves, they might quietly have submitted; but even then the king would have been greatly injured in his revenues by losing the benefit of the skill and industry of a nation, labouring for its own welfare.

The king was startled at the news, and asked in a rage, "Who is he, and where is he, that durst presume in his heart to do so?" Now came the fearful moment for Haman: "And Esther said, The adversary and enemy is this wicked Haman."

Haman was so terrified that he could not speak. The king, in the meanwhile, arose from his seat, and went out in haste to walk about the palace garden, for he would not sit where Haman was; and if he thought of the decree he had issued against the Jews, in which Esther was involved, he was perhaps the more angry that Haman should coolly have drawn him into such a plot. As soon as the king was gone, Haman stood up before the queen, and humbly begged for his life, for he saw by the king's countenance that he determined to punish him. The king soon returned, and Haman, scarcely knowing what he did, had then thrown himself down upon the knees of the queen, to implore her mercy. An Eastern prince can scarcely endure that any one should even look at his princess, much less touch her, which is considered a great liberty indeed; and when the king saw Haman before the queen, he never stopped in his rage to hear his petition, but instantly gave signs for his execution. The attendants obeyed his commands, covered his face, which is a sign that the person is condemned, and hurried him away. One of the king's chamberlains then asked him how Haman should die? And he





told him of the high gallows which he had prepared to hang the honoured and faithful Mordecai. "Then the king said, Hang him thereon." In most Eastern countries, the king's command is the law, and the life and death of his subjects depend entirely on his pleasure; his word was enough, and Haman was executed.

THE EIGHTH, NINTH, AND TENTH CHAPTERS OF ESTHER.

Mordecai's Advancement—Decree in favour of the Jews—The Jews' Victory over their Enemies—The Establishment of the Feast of Purim.

"The Jews had light and gladness, and joy, and honour."—
Chap. viii. 16.

The same day on which Haman was executed, the king took all his property and gave it to Esther. He also gave Mordecai the ring which he had given to Haman, and which he used to wear as a proof of the king's favour. And Esther made Mordecai her steward, to manage the riches of Haman, which now became hers.

Though Haman was dead, the dreadful decree had yet gone out against the Jews to destroy them, and the laws of the Persians would not allow of its being revoked. Esther, however, ventured again into the presence of the king, fell down before him, and entreated him, even with tears, to prevent the mischief which Haman had "devised against the Jews." So the king ordered Mordecai to write another decree, after the manner in which Haman's was written, and to send it into the hundred and twenty-seven provinces over which he ruled. In this decree he gave the Jews leave to arm themselves, and if any attacked them, by the permission of the former decree, they were to gather together in bodies, and stand for their lives, and the property of all those whom they defeated was to become theirs.

Mordecai made no delay, but sent off copies of the new decree, sealed with the king's ring; and posts on horseback, mules, camels, and young dromedaries, were despatched with them in every direction.





Mordecai was now promoted to great honour as the king's favourite. "And Mordecai went out from the presence of the king in royal apparel of blue and white, and with a great crown of gold, and with a garment of fine linen and purple; and the city of Shushan rejoiced and was glad." Haman was, no doubt, a very austere man, not only to the Jews, but to others; and most likely got much of his wealth by his severity. All the people of Shushan were therefore glad, to see his place occupied by so good a man as Mordecai; and "the Jews had light and gladness," that is, prosperity, "and joy, and honour." And in all places where the decree was sent, the Jews kept a feast; "and many of the people of the land became Jews; for the fear of the Jews fell upon them." They were made proselytes; that is, they, not being born Jews, submitted to all the rites of Jews, and united in their worship of the true God. Some might do this out of interest, hoping to gain the favours of the court, and of those who were its officers, as Esther and Mordecai were in such high favour with the king. Some might become Jews to save their lives, fearing that they might perish by their vengeance, when the new decree was acted upon. But we may hope and believe, that not a few were struck with the clear proof of God's protecting providence over the nation; and so they desired to cast in their lot among them, and to have the Jews' God for their God.

As the day approached for the decree of Haman to be executed, the Jews, aware that they had many enemies, "gathered themselves together in their cities, throughout all the provinces of the king Ahasuerus, to lay hand on such as sought their hurt." And instead of hurting them, "all the rulers of the provinces, and the lieutenants, and the deputies, and officers of the king, helped the Jews; because the fear of Mordecai fell upon them." Mordecai being now chief minister of the king, they did not know how he might punish them, if they acted on Haman's decree, and the fame of the new minister was spread every where, and he increased daily in power.

Some of the Jews' enemies, however, would not let them alone, and the Jews slew them. In the city of Shushan, they destroyed





five hundred men, who were probably of Haman's party, and tried to avenge the death of that bad man. Among these were the ten sons of Haman. They did, not, however, take their property, though the king's decree allowed it; and thus they showed that they were not moved by malice to kill their enemies, but only acted in defence of their own lives.

When the king learned that the Jews had killed five hundred in the city, he wished to know how many more of their enemies had fallen. And he asked the queen if she was now satisfied, or desired any thing more? She then asked that Haman's ten sons might be hanged upon the gallows on which their father was hung. It was usual among the Persians to hang criminals even after they were dead; that their bodies might be disgraced. This request of Esther's was not out of malice, but justice, to make an example of the wicked enemies of her country. Haman's sons had most likely been his counsellors in his wickedness, and had helped to forward his plans, and they had now shown their malice in fighting against the Jews. By hanging them, as the last remainder of Haman's house, they would be a warning to others to take care in future, how they tried to injure the people of God. The king granted this request to Esther, and the bodies of Haman's sons were hanged.

The next day, the Jews had another battle at Shushan, and slew three hundred more of their enemies. Those in the provinces slew "seventy and five thousand," but none of them took any of the property of those they slew.

Thus, having come off victorious, the Jews "had rest from their enemies." And some of them made the fourteenth, and some the fifteenth day of the month Adar, "a day of feasting and gladness;" and they sent portions of the feast to each other, and especially to the poor, that they might share in all their enjoyments. So that the very day when their enemies thought to destroy them, they themselves were destroyed; and the Jews, instead of mourning and desolation, were the subjects of great joy.

Mordecai wished never to forget the goodness of God in preserving him and his people from such extreme danger; he therefore, sent letters to all the Jews, desiring them to keep the four





teenth and fifteenth days of the month Adar, in every year, in order to preserve in their memories the great goodness of God in saving them from the cruelty of Haman. We should never forget remarkable instances of God's goodness to us; and if we do not celebrate them with feasting, we should always remember the day in which they occurred with thanksgiving.

The Jews readily agreed to keep the proposed days; and, as Haman had fixed upon the period by pur, that is, lot, "they called these days Purim, after the name of Pur." And they ordained that not only themselves, but their families, in every future generation, should keep this festival to commemorate the remarkable providence of God, in saving them from the hands of the wicked Haman. Esther and Mordecai also wrote letters to confirm this decree.

Nothing more is said of Mordecai, because this book was written only to show the care of God over his peculiar people. But there were many other interesting things about his greatness, as well as about the deeds of Ahasuerus, which were "written in the chronicles of the kings of Media and Persia," but which are now lost. How many old histories have perished, as the world itself must perish! The memorials of great empires are gone for ever; but the Bible remains, the oldest, the best, and the most interesting of books, giving a history of God's people, even from the beginning of time; and shall be an imperishable memorial of his spiritual dominion over the hearts of men. till all the subjects of his grace shall reign with him in glory.



MORDECAI RIDING THROUGH THE CITY.





JOB AND HIS THREE FRIENDS.



THE BOOK OF JOB,

OR,

THE HISTORY OF A GOOD MAN IN THE EAST, WHO WAS
MUCH AFFLICTED.



THE FIRST TO THE FORTY-SECOND CHAPTER INCLUSIVE BEING THE
WHOLE OF THAT BOOK.

“So the Lord blessed the latter end of Job more than his beginning; for he had fourteen thousand sheep, and six thousand camels, and a thousand yoke of oxen, and a thousand she-asses.

“He had also seven sons, and three daughters.”—Chap. xlii. 12, 13.



THE book which we have now to notice is called Job. It contains a short history of a good man of that name. He lived in the land of Uz, supposed to have been part of an Eastern country called Arabia. The time when he lived is not exactly known, but, from some circumstances, it is supposed that he was distantly related to Abraham, and a descendant of Nahor, his brother. As he lived to a good old age, it is thought that he was alive when the Israelites were oppressed in Egypt, and that he main





tained the pure worship of God in his country, when idolatry was every where else overspreading the world.

No one knows who wrote this book ; some thinking that it was Ezra, some that it was Isaiah, some that it was Solomon, some that it was Moses, some that it was Elihu, and some that it was Job himself.

Some have also supposed that it is a parable, intended to set forth the afflictions to which a good man may be liable—the care of God over him—and the final deliverance which he shall at some time enjoy. Most who have written about him, however, agree in thinking that his history is no parable, but a history of a real person, because he is mentioned as such in Ezekiel and James. It contains, indeed, some singular things ; but so do all histories written in the earliest periods of the world, as it was usual to write most of them in poetry, in which fanciful thoughts are sometimes mixed with plain facts. I shall pass by the poetry, and attend to the facts only ; and when we come to the Book of Psalms, I shall tell you something about Hebrew poetry, as not only Job, but the Psalms, and the prophets, are all written in poetry. Rhyme is not necessary to make poetry, for we have in English what is called blank verse, and in this the finest poetry in the world has always been written. In our English translations from the Hebrew Bible, we have not put the verses into the form of poetry, but the fine thoughts which they contain are still preserved for our instruction and delight.

The book begins with giving us Job's character ; it is such as makes us at once interested in all that happens to him, for he "was perfect and upright, and one that feared God and eschewed evil."—Not that he had no sin, but his conduct was as sincere as that of a man could be, and he did every thing with the best intent ; while those around him were idolaters, he served God ; and while they lived in sinful practices, he eschewed or avoided evil.

This good man had seven sons and three daughters, and no doubt felt happy in seeing his dear children around him. He was also very rich, in what made the riches of those days, especially in his country : "His substance also was seven thousand sheep, and three thousand camels, and five hundred yoke of oxen, and





five hundred she-asses, and a very great household ; so that this man was the greatest of all the men of the East."

His children were very happy among themselves, and seemed to have loved each other, as good brothers and sisters ought, with a sincere affection. At particular times of the year they had feasts, as we now have at Thanksgiving; and then they all met together, as many families do at least once a year with us, and the sisters were invited to meet with the brothers. Probably the brothers had these feasts in succession at their houses. And when they were over, good Job, who loved their souls as well as their bodies, lost no time in offering up "burnt-offerings, according to the number of them all; for Job said, it may be that my sons have sinned, and cursed God in their hearts. Thus did Job continually." As at all times men are in danger of sin, so are they more so when they are partaking of the good things which providence has given them to eat and drink; and therefore, lest any of them should have used any wrong words, or said any thing that was not as reverent as it ought to have been respecting God, Job offered up these sacrifices for them, that God might pardon them. So do kind parents now pray for their dear children, and entreat God that they may not fall into temptation, and that he would pardon all their sins, for the sake of Jesus Christ, that great sacrifice that was offered up once for all.

From the circumstance of Job offering up the sacrifice, it is supposed, with good reason, that he lived before the time of Moses, for, only in the days of the patriarchs, did good men act as the priests of their families; after that time, God appointed priests "both to offer up gifts and sacrifices for sins." These sacrifices were types or representations of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, and were no doubt offered up in faith, believing that, "in the fulness of time," the sacrifice which they represented would be offered up in the death of Christ; and that that sacrifice would make these of benefit, as they led the soul to rest alone upon it. These sacrifices were a confession of sin, and of the need of its being done away, in order that those who offered them might obtain pardon.

As at this time there were good men about Job, who agreed to





call upon the name of the Lord, these "sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord." Satan, too, got into their assemblies, and suggested bad thoughts to their minds. Satan, however, does not merely mean the name of the bad spirit, but also signifies an accuser; and any evil people who found fault with the perfect Job, and said ill things of him, as they do now of those who fear God, and accused him of serving God for some selfish purposes, might well bear the name of Satan. Many, however, think that the evil spirit is here intended throughout, and, although we cannot tell how God and Satan could hold conversation, yet, that it actually took place, between the good and evil spirits. It is enough for us, however, to know that Job was accused in that question, "Doth Job fear God for nought?"—meaning, is he not a gainer by it? Does he not prosper? He may then well serve his God! "Hast thou not made a hedge about him?" that is, protected him—"and about his house, and about all that he hath on every side? Thou hast blessed the work of his hands, and his substance is increased in the land." But only let his circumstances be changed, and see if he will serve God then. No, to be sure. "But, put forth thine hand now, and touch all that he hath, and he will curse thee to thy face." So said the accuser.

In order to show that the religion of Job was genuine, and that he could serve God in a low estate as well as when surrounded by wealth, God allowed afflictions to come fast upon him. "And there was a day when his sons and his daughters were feasting and drinking wine in their eldest brother's house." And just in this happy moment, when Job must have been delighting himself in the happiness of his children, there came a messenger unto Job, and said, "The oxen were ploughing, and the asses feeding beside them, and the Sabeans fell upon them, and took them away; yea, they have slain the servants with the edge of the sword; and I only am escaped alone to tell thee." Here, in one moment, his "five hundred yoke of oxen," and his "five hundred asses," which formed a valuable part of Job's substance, were all taken away. This sort of plundering was practised by these Sabeans, and in the East there are no greater plunderers to this day than the wild Arabs, who live in the parts near which Job resided. To add to





Job's misfortunes, his servants also were slain, who, according to the customs of those times, became such by being born in his house, or bought with his money, and were therefore a part of his property.

This messenger had not done telling his sad story before another arrived; and he said, "The fire of God is fallen from heaven, and hath burned up the sheep, and the servants, and consumed them; and I only am escaped alone to tell thee." Thus were his "seven thousand sheep" at once destroyed by lightning, and he had neither food nor wool for clothing.

Before this messenger had done speaking, another yet came from another part of Job's estates, where his camels were kept, and he said, "The Chaldeans made out three bands, and fell upon the camels, and have carried them away, yea, and slain the servants with the edge of the sword; and I only am escaped alone to tell thee." Thus Job lost all that he had, for now his "three thousand camels" were gone, being stolen by a people, who, as ancient history tells us, lived by plundering others.

Still the good man might have comforted himself that he was not left alone in his deep afflictions. He had his seven sons and his three daughters spared to him, and, though his property was valuable, they were dearer to him than all, and children so affectionate towards each other would still comfort and support their venerable and beloved parent. But, while the last messenger was yet speaking, "there came also another, and said, Thy sons and thy daughters were eating and drinking wine in their eldest brother's house. And, behold, there came a great wind from the wilderness, and smote the four corners of the house, and it fell upon the young men, and they are dead; and I only am escaped alone to tell thee." There are very strong winds in Arabia, and God now suffered these to blow upon the house in which Job's sons were, so that all these calamities reduced him from riches to poverty, and from great happiness to deep sorrow, in one day!—O what a sad day! Some men, who had no God to whom they could go for relief, would have gone mad, and some would have raged furiously against God for suffering all this evil to come upon them. But "Job arose, and rent his mantle, and shaved his





head," in token of his being in great distress; "and fell down upon the ground and worshipped," to express the humility of his mind and his dependence still upon God; so that he did not curse him to his face, as the adversary said he would, if God severely afflicted him. And he said, "Naked came I out of my mother's womb," or mother earth, "and naked shall I return thither: the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." As if he had said, "All I had came from God, he gave it me; and he has thought proper to take it away. Whatever he does is all right, though it be ever so painful to me; so I will not murmur, but still bless his holy name!"

How beautiful does the piety of Job here appear. "In all this Job sinned not," that is, he uttered no wrong expression about what God had suffered to be done to him, "nor charged God foolishly."

The adversary was still inclined to accuse Job, and though he had shown so much piety under his losses, still his tongue was employed in accusing him of not being sincere before God. I think it very likely that though Satan is mentioned as doing this, yet it may mean that wicked people, set on by the workings of his evil spirit on their spirits, might be his accusers, and so Satan might accuse Job through them. However, the adversary now said, that if Job's life was in danger from a painful disease, he would then no longer love God, and so his religion would be at an end. Well, God then suffered sore boils to smite Job, and to cover him all over from head to foot. And he was so bad that he took a piece of a broken pot to scrape himself, and he sat down in a heap of ashes. To add to his misery yet further, his wife provokingly asked him if he would now be religious any longer, as he had proof enough that his religion did not save him from trouble; she then told him to curse God rather than bless him, and then die in despair. This wicked woman, however, failed in shaking the piety of Job. For he said unto her, "Thou speakest as one of the foolish women speaketh. What! shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?" Meaning, that he had had many good things which God sent him, and, if God had thought





it right, he would have continued those good things, for he knew what was fittest for him. And now, if God sent him trouble, he was sure that it was for wise ends, and therefore he would not murmur. "In all this did not Job sin with his lips."

In the midst of his trouble three of Job's particular friends, having heard of what had happened to him, came from their distant places of abode to visit him. They are called Eliphaz the Temanite, and Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite. When they approached his house they saw him in his sad condition, but he was so altered, that in any other place they would not have known him. At this sight they were much affected, and even wept. Then, as a sign of their grief, they "rent every one his mantle," or cloak; and they took up handfuls of dust from the ground and throwing them into the air, let them fall in showers on their heads. Then "they sat down with him upon the ground seven days and seven nights, and none spake a word unto him, for they saw that his grief was very great." Not indeed, but that they took some food and rest during this time, or they could not have lived; but they spent most of the nights, as well as days, in showing their sorrow. It was customary to mourn seven days on any occasion of great grief; Joseph "made a mourning for his father seven days;" and the inhabitants of Jabesh-Gilead, after they had buried the bodies of Saul and his sons, who had been slain by the Philistines, in the same manner, fasted seven days.

Job at last broke the silence, and opened his mouth with cursing the day in which he was born. He did not indeed curse and swear—he was too good a man to do so—but he gave way to strong expressions of complaint, which is what is meant here by cursing. For we have his words put down, "Let the day perish wherein I was born, and the night in which it was said, There is a man-child conceived. Let that day be darkness; let not God regard it from above, neither let the light shine upon it." He thought that his birth-day, instead of being a day of rejoicing, ought rather to have everything bad said about it, or rather to be for ever forgotten, for it had only brought him into a world of the greatest sorrow. Here, however, though Job showed impatience, which was wrong, he said nothing against God or religion, and





showed that he was not inclined to depart from the fear of God, because he had afflicted him.

His friends then spoke to him one after another. But instead of giving him any comfort, they only irritated his mind. Though they were good men, they foolishly supposed that Job never could have been so afflicted, if he had not done something that was very wicked. They therefore told him that he must have been guilty of being a hypocrite, and that all his religion was in mere show, and not in his heart. They also accused him, as he was a great man, of being what great men in power too often are—especially in the East—a great oppressor, and a covetous man. Job could not bear this, for he knew it was not true, and he was hurt at his friends adding to his sorrows, by thinking so badly of him. This made him speak of himself in the high and good terms in which he sometimes did in the course of their conversation; not that he was vain of his goodness or good deeds, and loved to talk about them, but he was obliged to do so in his own defence. Yet he owned, as every good man will, that he was truly a sinner before God, and this no doubt helped to reconcile him to God's allowing him thus to be afflicted; but he still held fast his religion, and he said of God, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him." He also comforted himself in the hope, that when this vain life should be over, he should see his Redeemer in a happier and a better world.

At length Job's friends, thinking it was of no use to talk to him any longer—as they could not make him admit that his sufferings were on account of his not being sincere before God, as they supposed,—the conversation was dropped. "So these three men ceased to answer Job, because he was righteous in his own eyes."

A young man of the name of Elihu, having heard the debate between Job and his friends, was very vexed at them all. He thought that Job had been wrong in trying so much to vindicate himself from the charge of having deserved his sufferings in a particular manner, while he had said little or nothing to vindicate the character and honour of God, though he had afflicted him. He was also very angry with Job's three friends, "because they had found no answer, and yet had condemned Job;" they were





unable to disprove what he had said about his own uprightness, and yet they had set him down as a hypocrite, because God had greatly afflicted him.

The young should always give place to the old, because the old ought first to be heard, and are expected, from having more years, to have also more wisdom. Elihu therefore "had waited till Job had spoken, because they were elder than he,"—that is, Job and his friends—and when Job had finally given over replying, and his friends speaking, Elihu made an apology for opening his mouth, and then said, "Hearken to me; I also will give mine opinion." Then he began to blame Job for saying so much about his own goodness, and complaining of his sufferings from the hand of God, though, indeed, he had not murmured against him in a spirit of rebellion. After remarking on many wrong expressions which Job had uttered, he, at length, closed all by vindicating the conduct of God in all his dealings in Providence with sinful men, and showing how impossible it is for us, his humble creatures, to search his ways even in common things. He pointed out the wonders of the thunder and lightning; the snow and the rain; the wind and the clouds; and then assured his hearers, that such a great God would not afflict without a just cause.

Elihu having done speaking, God, in some wonderful way, at length himself spoke, with a strong voice which proceeded out of a whirlwind that sprung up at the time. By this voice he reminded Job of his divine power and glory in all the works of creation, and called upon him to humble himself before him as the Judge of all the earth. Then Job cried out, "Behold, I am vile!" And after the voice from God had spoken once more, Job owned his folly and ignorance, confessed his sins, and repented before God; for, though he was a good man, the best of men have many reasons to humble themselves daily before the most holy God, and to say in his most pure presence, as Job did, that they "repent in dust and ashes"—the most humbling sign of grief and misery.

Then, as Job's friends had wrongly accused him, and judged harshly of him, God spoke to "Eliphaz the Temanite," and told him that he was displeased with him and his two friends, for what they had said about Job. And he desired them to go with Job,





who should offer up a sacrifice which he would accept, in order to take away his displeasure. Thus, after all his sufferings, God honoured Job before his friends. In reading of this sacrifice offered by Job for his friends, we are also reminded that as we have sinned against God, and do often offend him, we must go to Jesus Christ our great advocate, as Job's friends did to him; and we must look to his sacrifice as the never-failing way of obtaining acceptance with God.

So when Job and his friends had done as God commanded, God accepted of them all, and received them into his favour.

And now Job became rich again in this world's wealth, for "the Lord gave Job twice as much as he had before." "Then came there unto him, all his brethren, and all his sisters, and all they that had been of his acquaintance before, and did eat bread with him in his house, and they bemoaned him, and comforted him over all the evil that the Lord had brought upon him; every man also gave him a piece of money, and every one an earring of gold. So the Lord blessed the latter end of Job more than his beginning; for he had fourteen thousand sheep, and six thousand camels, and a thousand yoke of oxen, and a thousand she-asses. He had also seven sons and three daughters. And he called the name of the first Jemima; and the name of the second, Kezia; and the name of the third, Keren-happuch. And in all the land were no women found so fair as the daughters of Job; and their father gave them an inheritance among their brethren;" and so divided a portion of his property among them, as he did among his sons.

"After this lived Job an hundred and forty years, and saw his sons, and his sons' sons, even four generations;" so that he is supposed to have lived about two hundred years. His great age is one reason which guides us to the time in which he lived, as, after the days of Moses, we read of none living to so lengthened a period.

"So Job died, being old and full of days."

Before we finish with the history of Job, some few words must be explained which you will meet with in the latter chapters, in which God speaks from the whirlwind.

In the thirty-eighth chapter and thirty-first verse, you will find



this question ; “ Canst thou bind the sweet influences of Pleiades or loose the bands of Orion ? ” By Pleiades is meant the seven stars which sometimes appear close together in one part of the sky ; and the question perhaps meant, Canst thou cluster together such a group of stars as that, Job ? Orion is a large group of stars, amounting to two thousand that may be seen : and more not clearly seen : and who can separate or alter them ? In the next verse we also read, “ Canst thou bring forth Mazaroth in his season ? or canst thou guide Arcturus with his sons ? ” By Mazaroth it is thought the South Pole, or the South part of the heavens or sky, is meant, with its stars. Arcturus is a constellation, or number of stars, seen sometimes near the North Pole, or Northern part of the world, and by its sons are probably meant its stars.

In the thirty-ninth chapter and ninth verse, there is another question that needs explaining : “ Will the Unicorn be willing to serve thee, or abide by thy crib ? ” Here Job is taught God's power by the beasts he has made. Unicorn means one-horned. Painters draw an animal on the Queen's arms which is like a horse with one horn. This is all fancy ; there is no such animal. Since men have learned more of the history of the different parts of the world, it has been found out that there is a creature called the Rhino-

ceros, which is very strong and fierce, and has one horn. Such a wild beast, though God made him with ease, Job could not even have dared to feed loose in his stable, or to make work in his fields.

In the thirteenth verse, we read of the Ostrich. This is a bird that is now often shown in this country, and the pictures of which you must frequently have seen. It is often taller than a man with a large body, thick and long legs, and long

neck. The feathers of its tail are very beautiful, and being





prepared, are among the most handsome ornaments worn by ladies.

In the fourteenth chapter and fifteenth verse, we read of the Behemoth, in which is described a huge and powerful creature, with bones as "strong pieces of brass," and "like bars of iron." Many writers think that this means the Elephant, but it seems most nearly to describe a very powerful creature called the Hippopotamus, or Sea-Horse.

Lastly, in the forty-first chapter, there is a grand description of the power of a creature belonging to the water. It is called Leviathan, but whether it means the Whale or the Crocodile is not certain, both being very large and powerful creatures, to which many parts of the description will apply. Many writers are inclined to think that the Whale is intended.

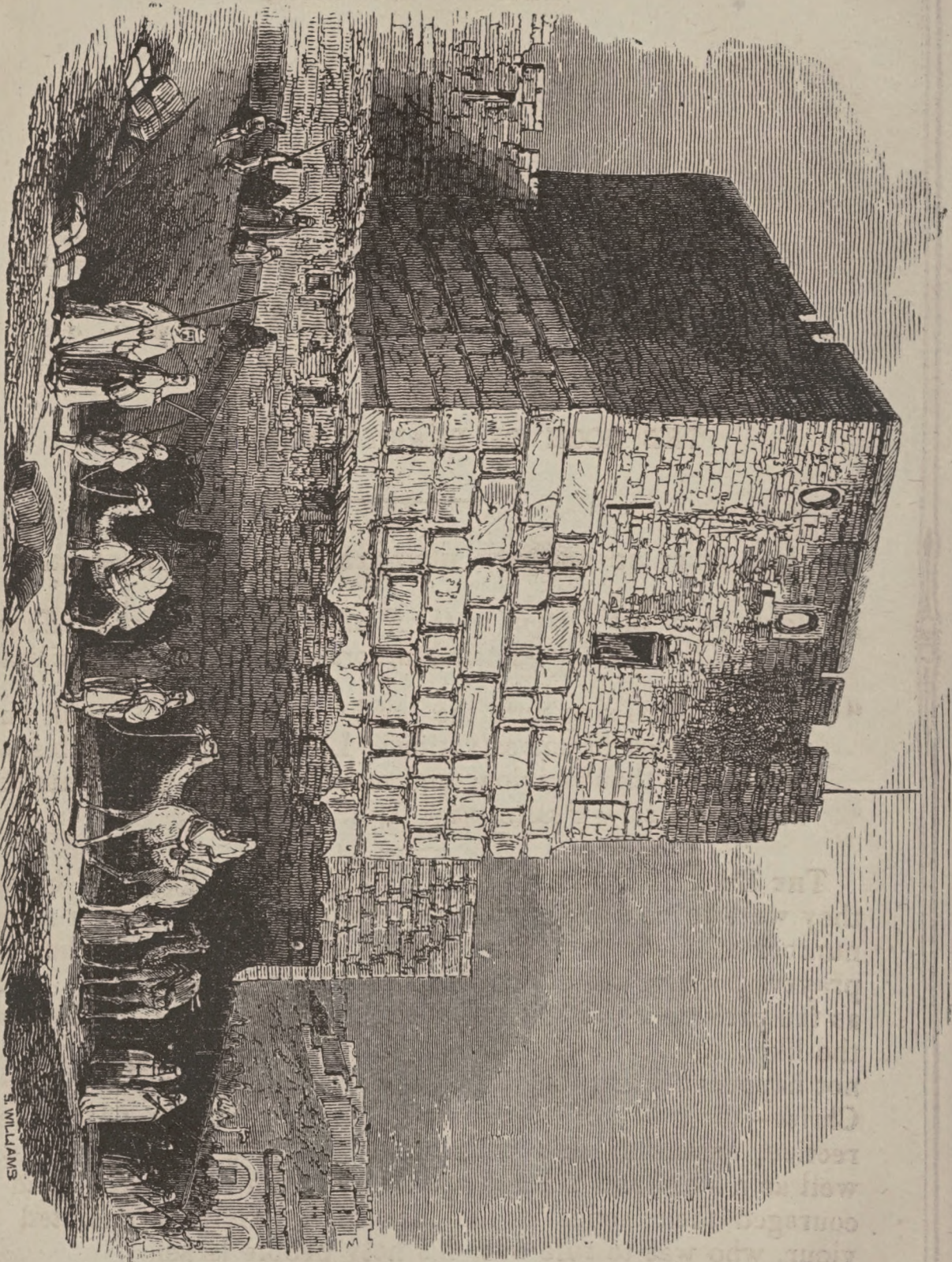
In finishing the history of Job, we learn that good men may be very much afflicted; and, that instead of supposing God does not love them because he afflicts them, we ought to believe that he intends to do them good by it; just as your kind parents intend to do you good, when they reprove you for doing what is wrong.

We are also taught that it is God who can make us rich or poor, and so we ought to be contented with what he sends us. When he thought it right to make Job poor, how soon he lost his all; and when he thought it right to make him rich again, how soon he recovered his wealth. God can do every thing; let us trust in him, love and serve him, and then we are sure that he will do every thing that is best for us, and bring us at last to heaven, where "God shall wipe away all tears from off all faces;" that is, where, what trouble soever may happen to us here, we shall not have any cause to weep any more.





PRAISE THE LORD ALL CEDARS



DAVID'S TOWER AT JERUSALEM.



THE BOOK OF PSALMS ;

OR,

THE BOOK OF PRAISES AND HYMNS.

THE FIRST TO THE ONE HUNDRED AND FIFTIETH PSALM.

Explanation of the Design of the Psalms—Their Poetical Expressions—Their Titles—Their Authors—Their Harsh Petitions.

“O, come, let us sing unto the Lord : let us make a joyful noise unto the rock of our salvation. Let us come before his presence with thanksgiving, and make a joyful noise unto him with psalms.”—Psalm. xcv. 1, 2.

THE Book of Psalms means “The Book of Praises,” because they were to be sung in the temple-worship, and because a great number of them are full of praise. Many of them are however prayers ; many are designed merely to teach important truths, as the providence or care of God, the necessity of holiness, and the like ; many are prophetical, and sing about things which had not happened when they were written, and especially about Jesus Christ—the glory of his person—his life, sufferings, death, resurrection, ascension, and kingdom—for David was a prophet as well as a king, and so God spake by him to his church, and encouraged their hopes in the Messiah, or divinely anointed Saviour, who was to rule over his holy people Israel.





As these psalms were to be sung, they were written in **POETRY**, though they are translated into prose in our Bible, because it was not possible to translate them word for word in any other way. Our psalms in verse give the meanings of the Scripture Psalms, but not the exact words.

The Psalms being written in poetry, for the purpose of *singing*, are full of poetical expressions, or words not commonly used in *prose*, or in the language in which we generally *talk*. This will account for many expressions which you, perhaps, do not easily understand; because, in poetry, what are called figures of speech are used, or one word is employed to mean another—things seen to explain things not seen, and things of earth, to describe things of heaven. Now, you will begin to understand some expressions which otherwise would be quite unintelligible to you. Let us notice a few.

First Psalm, Third Verse.—"His leaf also shall not wither." The psalmist is speaking of a godly man, and he compares him to a flourishing evergreen tree. Then to show how he prospers, he says the leaf of this tree shall never wither; that is, this good man, who has just been compared to a never-fading tree, shall always have God's blessing upon him, to make his soul flourish and grow in grace.

Third Psalm, Third Verse.—"But thou, O Lord, art a shield for me." But how is God a shield? A shield is a round or oval large piece of wood or metal, which the ancient warrior carried before him, to guard his heart from the swords and arrows of the enemy. Thus the shield was the soldier's *protector*. And that is what the psalmist means when he says God is a shield: he means that God is the good man's protector. You will often find this word used in the Psalms respecting God, and you will now see what it always means when so used.

Third Psalm, Seventh Verse.—"Thou hast smitten all mine enemies upon the cheek-bone; thou hast broken the teeth of the ungodly." The first of these expressions means contempt, and signifies that those who hated the holy David were despised by the holy God, as striking on the cheek, or boxing the ear, as we call it, has always been considered as a sign of displeasure. To





break the teeth signifies destroying the power to do harm ; for the furious creature deprived of teeth, how much soever he may rage, can never bite. Wicked men may rage against good men, but God can always restrain their power when he pleases.

Fifth Psalm, Ninth Verse.—"Their throat is an open sepulchre." The psalmist is here speaking of wicked men—men who are lying, cruel, and deceitful. And he means that they are dangerous companions, so that they are not safe who listen to them ; for while "they flatter with their tongue," and say good-natured things, their words, proceeding from their throats and mouths, are defiled like the sepulchre which contains the putrid body ; or, like the sepulchre, they are only prepared to bury those whom they have ruined, as in a grave of wretchedness.

Sixth Psalm, Seventh Verse.—"Mine eye is consumed because of grief." Now this does not mean that the psalmist had lost his eye-sight from his sorrow, but is a strong expression, allowed to be used in poetry, to mean the greatest grief. The lustre of the eye fades away in much grief, as the flame of the candle when it is nearly consumed. His eye was "sunk in his head," as the candle in the socket.

Seventh Psalm, Eleventh Verse.—"God is angry with the wicked every day." Here we are not to suppose that God is angry as we are. When we are angry we sin, but God cannot sin. When we are angry we are not happy, but God is always happy. But as God cannot so much as look upon sin and not determine to punish it, so he is said to be angry at sinners, because this is a word by which we can understand what our feelings are about those things that disgust us.

In the following verses of the same psalm, we read of God "whetting his sword," "bending his bow," and "ordaining or directing his arrows against the persecutors." You will not now suppose that God wears a sword, or carries bows and arrows. Always remember that "God is a spirit," and not flesh and blood as we are. But as the sword, the bow, and the arrow, were the destroying instruments of war generally in use before gunpowder was invented, so we are here taught that God was preparing his power to destroy all the persecutors of his people.





Eleventh Psalm, Fourth Verse.—Here we read that the Lord's "eyes behold, his eyelids try the children of men." This is only to denote, that as easily as we see every thing with our bodily eyes, so God, who is a spirit, can see the very inside of all hearts and thoughts, and can try and judge every design, and motive or reason, for every thing we do. Let us always remember this.

Eighteenth Psalm, Second Verse.—"The Lord is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my buckler, and the horn of my salvation, and my high tower." Here we have many expressions meaning the same thing. David's heart was so full of trust in God, that he did not know where to find words to express it; and because one would not do, he used many. The inside of a rock is a place of security against a storm; and it was a refuge often used in Judea to hide from an enemy; some of the caves in the rocks of that country being large enough to hold a little army, as we have noticed in the history of David. A fortress was also fled to for defence; it was often built upon a high rock, and it was not easy to get at those within it. The buckler, like the shield, was a similar defence for the body when exposed in war. The high tower was often a last refuge when a fortress was taken, being built within it. All these words, then, just meant that God was David's defence and strength; and all that these places could be to him as a soldier, God was to his soul as his protector. "The horn of my salvation" means also the same thing. Horns, however, belong to animals, and not to men; and this figure of speech is taken from the horned beast, whose strength of defence lies in his horn, with which he pierces and pushes down his enemies.

The seventh and following verses of this psalm are very grand indeed, and are intended to describe the astonishing deliverance of Israel out of Egypt, when God plagued the Egyptians and destroyed them, as you have read in the Book of Exodus; and also the solemn giving of the law in thunders on Mount Sinai, of which there is likewise an account in the same book. Here the church is taught to sing praises to God about these great events, which the ancient people of Israel, in particular, were always called to remember. To describe the greatness of God's power when he





delivered his people out of Egypt, and when he gave his holy laws on Mount Sinai, the psalmist collects together in his mind all that is grand and awful in nature. The earthquake; the thunder storm; the clouds; the winds; the hail; the lightnings; the pestilence; the flood; these are all made to describe the power and greatness of Almighty God! So that when you read, "There went up a smoke out of his nostrils, and fire out of his mouth devoured: coals were kindled by it;" you will not understand it that God has nostrils like a creature, and those nostrils really breathed fire; but only as expressing, in fine poetry, the effects of the Almighty's power when he appears in his terrible grandeur, fearful as the smoking mountain and the burning volcano. And when you read of his "flying upon the wings of the wind," it is to signify that the wind only blows as he directs it, and that, when he moves in his great power, his progress is quick and mighty as the rapid stormy wind.

Thirty-fifth Psalm, Seventh Verse.—"For without cause have they hid for me their net in a pit, which, without cause, they have digged for my soul." David here means, not that his enemies had really laid a net in a pit to catch him, as was the custom to catch wild beasts,—but that they acted as craftily towards him to entrap him and do him injury.

Fifty-sixth Psalm, Tenth Verse.—"Thou tellest my wanderings: put thou my tears into thy bottle: are they not in thy book?" When people died, among most of the nations in former ages of the world, their bodies were burned, and not buried. Their ashes were then collected and put into vessels called urns; and their friends, who wept over their remains, dropped their tears so as to be collected and put into bottles, which were placed in the ashes and safely kept. Now this explains what David means when he prays, "Put thou my tears into a bottle;" not that God has any bottle to hold our tears, but that God would take notice of his troubles—that he would keep his tears in remembrance, and comfort his soul under them, and deliver him out of his griefs.

Fifty-seventh Psalm, Fourth Verse.—"My soul is among lions." By lions David means wicked men, who are ready to destroy him if they could, and were fierce and savage; and so he calls





them lions. At this time he was pursued by Saul and his party, who, you remember, tried to take him and kill him. He wrote many of these Psalms when he fled first from Saul, and afterwards from Absalom, his rebellious son.

Sixtieth Psalm, Eighth Verse.—"Moab is my wash-pot; over Edom will I cast out my shoe." When I was quite young, I have thought these were odd words, because I did not understand them. Moab, you know, was a country, and the name of the country is here put for that of the people—the Moabites. Now, neither the country nor the people could be David's wash-pot. The words only mean, that as a wash-pot was used to wash the hands and the feet—that is, for low and mean purposes—so the wicked Moabites were made to serve as drudges to the king of Israel. To "cast out the shoe over Edom," is supposed to mean to set his foot upon Edom, as a sign that he ruled over the Edomites. These words occur again in the hundred and sixth psalm, and the ninth verse.

Sixty-ninth Psalm, First and Second Verses.—"Save me, O God, for the waters are come in unto my soul. I sink in deep mire, where there is no standing: I am come into deep waters, where the floods overflow me." "Waters," and "deep mire," and "floods," are all words which are used to express great trouble; as a man sinking in deep waters, or nearly smothered in mire, or washed away by a flood, would be in the greatest distress. You will often read such language, and, as in this text, it signifies great affliction.

The titles of the Psalms are often difficult to understand. We must just look at them. You will observe that many of them were written at the time of particular events which happened to David, of which you have read in his history. The third psalm is called a psalm of David, when he fled from Absalom his son. The seventh psalm is concerning the words of Cush, the Benjamite, who seems wrongfully to have accused David to Saul. The eighteenth psalm is a psalm of praise to God, written by David in the day that the Lord delivered him from all his enemies, and from the hand of Saul. The thirtieth was sung at the dedication of the house of David, when he had built and finished his house of cedar upon Mount Sion. The thirty-fourth is called a psalm





of David, when he changed his behaviour before Abimelech ; who drove him away, and he departed. You remember that David fled from Saul to Achish, king of Gath : that, being discovered there, he changed his behaviour, and was considered as one mad ; and so he was driven away, and escaped the danger that he feared. On that occasion he made this psalm. We ought always to be thankful to God for our merciful escapes from any dangers ; and if we do not, or cannot make psalms, we should express our gratitude to God, and David's words will often help us so to do. The thirty-eighth psalm is called "a psalm to bring to remembrance." David was then in trouble, and brings to remembrance why God afflicted him ; for we shall always find when God afflicts us, that there is a reason for it, and that we have not loved and served him as we ought to do, and have sinned against him so as to deserve his chastisement. The forty-fifth is called "a song of loves." It is a prophecy about Christ, and is quoted as such in the Epistle to the Hebrews ; and it shows the love which the church of Christ, that is, his people, everywhere have to him, and their delight in his honour and glory. The fifty-first psalm was written after Nathan had told his parable to David, when he had caused the death of his faithful soldier, Uriah. It shows how his heart was broken before God on account of his great sin. The fifty-second psalm is called "a psalm of David, when Doeg, the Edomite, came and told Saul, and said unto him, David is come to the house of Ahimelech." You recollect that David, having escaped from Saul, went to Ahimelech the priest, at Nob, from whom he received bread and a sword. Doeg, the Edomite, was present, and he told Saul of all that had taken place. Saul instantly charged the priest with being guilty of treason ; and, though he protested he was quite innocent, Saul would not believe him, but ordered his men to slay him and all the other priests that were with him. This they refused to do ; but Doeg obeyed his command, slew eighty-five priests, destroyed the city of Nob itself, and even killed all the men, women, and little children, oxen, asses, and sheep. When David heard this sad account of what the wicked Doeg had done, he wrote this psalm. The fifty-fourth psalm was written "when the Zi-





phim," or Ziphites, "came and said to Saul, Doth not David hide himself with us?" of which you may read in the fourteenth chapter of the First Book of Samuel, and in the beginning of the twenty-sixth chapter of the same book. The fifty-sixth psalm was composed "when the Philistines took him in Gath," of which you may see the account in the twenty-first chapter of the First Book of Samuel, from the tenth verse. The fifty-seventh psalm was made "when he fled from Saul in the cave." In the cave of Adullam or Engedi, he was so surrounded by Saul's guard, that it seemed impossible he should escape death if he ventured out. This danger occasioned the psalm, and explains why he says, "My soul is among lions;" "They have prepared a net for my steps;" "They have digged a pit for me." Saul and his men were fierce as lions against him, and ready, like wild beasts, to destroy him; they surrounded him as with a net, so that he appeared to have no means of escape; and, by their schemes to entrap him, they might be said to have digged a pit for him, as they did to catch the wild beasts. The fifty-ninth psalm is a prayer to God for help, "when Saul sent and they watched the house to kill him!" See the nineteenth chapter of the First Book of Samuel, and the eleventh verse. The sixtieth psalm: read the eighth chapter of the Second Book of Samuel, and the eighteenth chapter of the First Book of Chronicles, if you would learn all the particulars of this part of David's history. The sixty-third psalm was composed by David "when he was in the wilderness of Judah;" as he fled there, both from Saul and Absalom, we cannot tell on which occasion he wrote it; but it shows how much he loved to worship God, and how greatly he was grieved, when he could not join the people in going to his sanctuary. The hundred and forty-second psalm by David is called "a prayer when he was in the cave."

Besides these titles, which show on what occasions many of the Psalms were written, there are other titles which are not given in English words; because it was not exactly known, by those who rendered the Hebrew Bible into English, what might be the meaning of those titles. I will tell you, however, what they are generally thought to mean.





The title to the fourth psalm is, "To the chief musician on Neginoth." Here I must remind you that there were many players upon musical instruments in the ancient Israelitish worship; and that these instruments were made with strings, to be struck with something to make them sound; or they were wind instruments sounded by the breath and of other sorts, something like those which are now used in bands of music. There was a master, or head, who directed all the players on each particular sort of instrument, or class of instruments. This was the chief musician. Now, David intended this psalm to be played upon an instrument, or perhaps a variety of instruments, called Neginoth; which is understood to mean a hand or stringed instrument; that is, an instrument made with strings, and played with the hand, and not with the mouth. The fifth psalm is "To the chief musician upon Nehiloth," and this word is descriptive of a hollow or wind instrument, or wind instruments, and the chief musician of the instrument, or the various instruments blown with the breath, was to direct the playing and singing of this psalm.

The sixth psalm is addressed, as the fourth, "To the chief musician on Neginoth," but it adds, "upon Sheminith." Sheminith means "the eighth"—that is, the eighth string, or the instrument with eight strings. So that the title means, "To the chief musician upon the stringed instruments, to be played upon the eight-stringed instrument; or, it might mean, to be played chiefly on the eighth string, in a very high tone. The seventh psalm is called "Shiggaion of David." The meaning of this word is not very plain; but perhaps, as it means "to wander," it signifies a psalm written like an ode; that is, with lines of all sorts of length, some very short and some very long, instead of continuing all in one steady measure. The eighth psalm is addressed "To the chief musician upon Gittith." It is thought likely by some that Gittith was an instrument which Jeduthun, and his family after him, played upon, and which was committed to the care of Obededom, the Gittite, and his family. The real meaning of this word is, however, not well known. Remember, it is not a part of the word of God, but only a title to the psalm, of no more import-





ance in itself than the number of the psalm, and so we lose nothing which it is needful for us to know, if we cannot always understand the meaning of a title.

The ninth psalm is directed "To the chief musician upon Muthlabben." This was, perhaps, the name of a tune, or of an instrument. The sixteenth psalm, and some others, have the title, "Michtam of David." Michtam means, "A golden or excellent psalm." Some think this was the name of a tune, which, on account of its excellency, was called golden, and to which David wished the words of his psalm to be sung; others think it was a musical instrument, which, being much admired, bore the name of Michtam. The twenty-second psalm is inscribed "To the chief musician on Aijelet Shahr." Some think the words mean "at the dawning of the day;" and so the psalm was intended to be sung by the priests and Levites every morning, as soon as the day began to appear. The thirty-second psalm is marked by the word "Maschil," which means instruction. This title may, therefore, merely describe what the psalm contains, or, like the others I have noticed, mean the name of the tune to which it was to be sung, or of the instrument on which it was to be played. The thirty-ninth psalm was intended for Jeduthun the musician, and the forty-second for the sons of Korah, who performed in the holy service. The forty-fifth psalm is addressed "To the chief musician upon Shoshannim," which was either the name of an instrument of six strings, or the first word in a sacred song, to the tune of which David might wish this psalm to be sung. The forty-sixth psalm was most probably intended, by the title, to be played upon an instrument called Alamoth, as it is mentioned in Chronicles. The fifty-third psalm is directed to the chief musician upon Mahalath, which is thought, by some, to have been a wind instrument. The title of the fifty-sixth psalm has a very difficult word, and is *for*, or "To the chief musician upon Jonath-elemrechokim." A learned man says that the words mean, "concerning the mute dove among them that are in far places;" and so they signify that when David wrote this psalm, he was as a quiet innocent dove, far from home, among the wicked Philistines. The fifty-seventh psalm has this title: "To the chief musician Altas





cnetn, Michtam of David, &c." Altascheth means, "do not destroy," and is thought to describe the state of trouble in which David's mind was, when he wrote the psalm; as if he had said, "A psalm written in great grief, when I prayed to God not to destroy me." The sixtieth psalm is "To the chief musician upon Shushan-eduth;" which perhaps means a six-stringed instrument. The word "Neginah," in the title of the sixty-first psalm, means the same as Neginoth; that is, a stringed instrument. The eighty-eighth psalm has this expression in the title: "To the chief musician upon Mahalath Leannoth." I have already said that Mahalath is taken for a musical wind instrument, and as Leannoth signifies to answer, it is likely that this psalm was to be sung in what we call responses; that is, by parties of singers singing by turns.

The hundred and nineteenth psalm is divided into as many parts as there are letters in the Hebrew alphabet; each part being of equal length, and having eight verses. Aleph, Beth, and the other words at the beginning of every ninth verse, are the names of the Hebrew letters, just as if we were to proceed in the same way with A, B, C. There are four psalms so divided, which we call alphabetical psalms. These are the twenty-fifth, thirty-fourth, thirty-seventh, and hundred and nineteenth; though only the latter is so distinguished in our Bibles. The reason for this order seems to have been merely to help the memory. As the first word of every eighth verse began with the same letter, it would be more easy to recollect what followed. Here it may be worthy of remark, that the hundred and nineteenth is the longest of the psalms, and longer than any chapter in the whole Bible. The hundred and twentieth psalm bears the name of "a song of degrees," as likewise do many others that follow. They are generally supposed to have been sung by the Levites as they ascended some steps in the temple when they engaged in the sacred services; and so they sung them through as they advanced, *by degrees*, up the steps. In many of the psalms, you will find the word "Selah." It is not certain what this means, but the most general opinion is that it was a mark in music, signifying that the singer should pause. In the ninth psalm, we have the words, "Higgaion,





Selah." Higgaion means meditation ; perhaps signifying that the singers should particularly meditate on what they were then singing, as well as pause.

We must now take notice of the authors of the Psalms ; for, though they are often called David's Psalms, they were not all written by him, and you will find many of them with other names. Many psalms are by Asaph, who is mentioned as a seer or prophet in the twenty-ninth chapter of the second book of Chronicles, and the thirtieth verse. The forty-fifth psalm is by Solomon, or written by some one for his use. The ninetieth psalm was written by Moses, and is supposed to have been occasioned by God's threatening to cut off the people of Israel from entering the land of Canaan, when they believed the reports of the timid spies about its dangers instead of trusting in God. Many psalms have not any names of their authors, and so they can only be guessed at from the subjects of them, and as they refer to events which happened when David was not living. Thus the hundred and thirty-seventh psalm is an affecting account of the sufferings of the Israelites, when they were captives in Babylon, and hung their harps on the willows which grew there in abundance by the side of the streams, refusing to play them, on account of their great sorrow. As this happened long after David's time, it is supposed that the psalm was written by some Levite on his entering, as a captive, into Babylon. Again ; the hundred and twenty-sixth psalm expresses joy on return from captivity ; and, as Ezra the scribe was among those released by the proclamation of Cyrus, it is supposed that he was its author.

With one more observation we shall finish the Book of Psalms. You will find some of them containing some very severe and angry expressions about punishing wicked men, and praying that God would do them all sorts of harm. Now, Jesus Christ tells us to pray for our enemies, and even to do good to them that hate us and do us harm. The word of God does not contradict itself ; and very learned men tell us that the parts which we so read are prophetic, and tell what God *will* do to the wicked.





and ought not to read in English as prayers for his vengeance to fall upon them. If, however, it were allowed to a Jew so to pray, it is not allowed to a Christian. We are to be merciful as our Father in heaven is merciful; and there is something very delightful to a pious mind to be able to return good for evil, and even to pray for a cruel enemy. Without we can do this, we only mock God, and shut ourselves out from hope of his mercy, when we pray, "Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us." My dear young reader, if any have offended you, or done you harm, can you forgive them, as I hope "God, for Christ's sake, hath forgiven you?" Think on this, and pray to God for a forgiving spirit, and that he would even help you to "love your enemies."





THE BOOK OF PROVERBS,

OR,

WISE SAYINGS OF KING SOLOMON.

THE FIRST TO THE THIRTY-FIRST CHAPTER OF PROVERBS.

"The proverbs of Solomon, the son of David, King of Israel."—
Chap. i. 1.

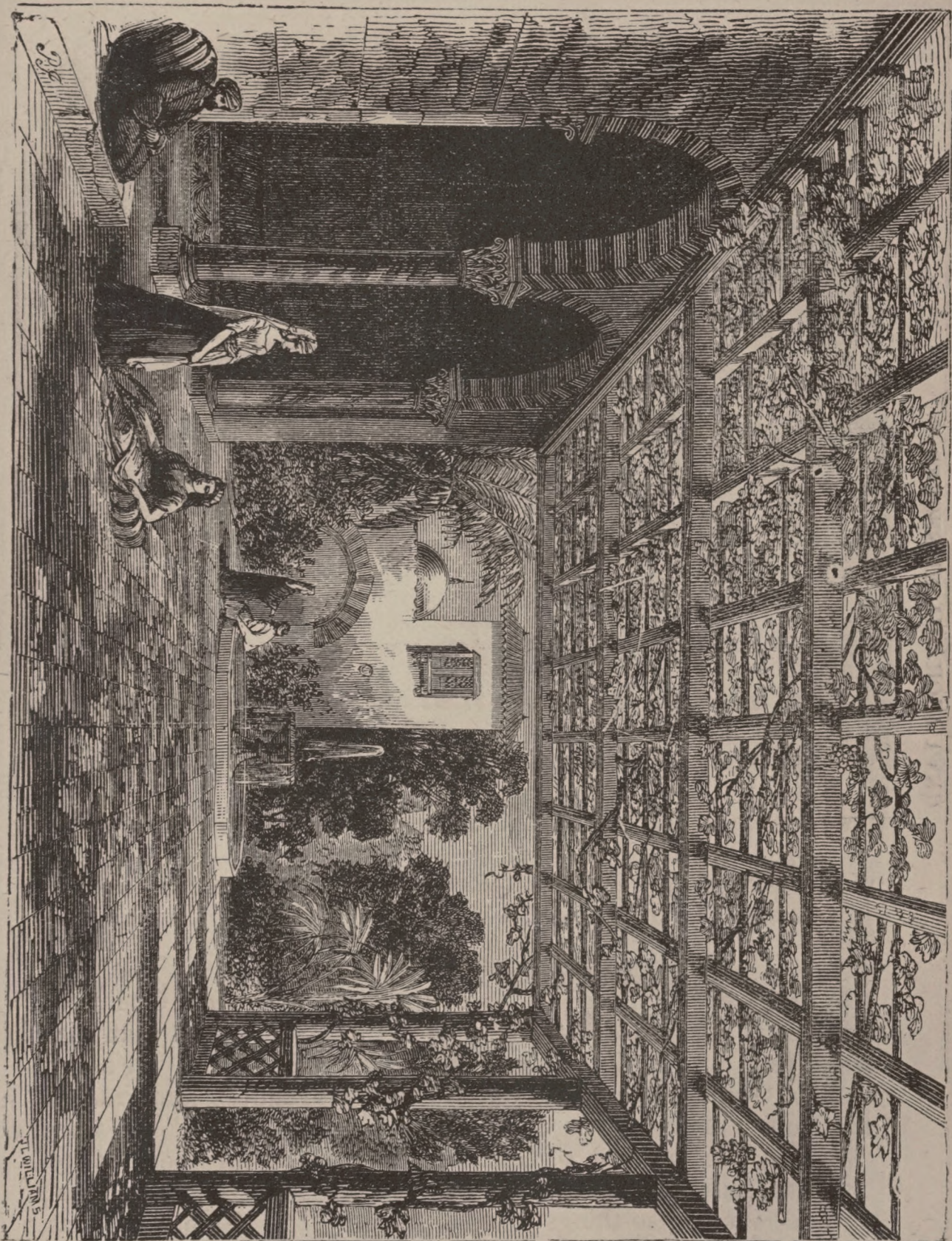
"My son, hear the instruction of thy father, and forsake not the
law of thy mother."—Ver. 8.

"Hearken unto me now, therefore, O ye children, and attend to
the words of my mouth."—Chap. vii. 24.

WHEN a wise man speaks, we ought to listen to him. God gave Solomon a great deal of wisdom—he was the wisest man that ever lived. And I will tell you how he got his wisdom. He asked for it of God, and God was pleased with his request, and granted it. And if any of you, my young readers, "lack," or want "wisdom," let him ask of God, who giveth it to all liberally.

We treasure up a great many foolish things in our memories; here are some wise things to treasure up. And remember, that,





SITTING UNDER THE VINE



A GARDEN IN THE HOLY LAND.



though Solomon speaks, yet as God gave him the wisdom, and it relates to what will make us good in life, and happy in death, and beyond the grave, we ought to mind every word we here read as if God spoke in our ears.

There are two sorts of Proverbs which I shall shortly notice. First, those which are difficult to understand; and secondly, those which you ought particularly to remember: pray to God to enable you to fasten them in your memories.

Let us look at some that need explaining. The Proverbs do not begin till the tenth chapter; the chapters before that are only a sort of introduction, to tell you what is coming, and how and why you ought to attend to it. It is said, "Wisdom crieth without, she uttereth her voice in the streets;" meaning, that the instruction of these proverbs is not a secret, but a thing published, that all may hear and become wise. Here wisdom is spoken of as if it were a female person.

Tenth Chapter, Fifth Verse.—"He that gathereth in summer is a wise son; but he that sleepeth in harvest is a son that causeth shame." All sons are not farmers; Solomon only means this, as Mr. Henry well explains it: "He that gets knowledge in the days of his youth gathers in summer, and he will have the comfort and credit of it; but he that idles away the days of his youth will bear the shame of it when he is old."

Tenth Chapter, Tenth Verse.—"He that winketh with the eye causeth sorrow." How can that be? Is there any harm, then, in winking with the eye? Not always; but it always means something sly; and here it signifies that the wicked go to work in a sly manner to ruin those who keep company with them; and wink one to another while they plot their ruin, and try to make others as vile as themselves.

Tenth Chapter, Fifteenth Verse.—"The rich man's wealth is his strong city." That is, the rich man often thinks himself secure as if he were in a fortified city, because he is great in riches and power. But this is a foolish thought, for the richest men have often become poor; and riches are at last no defence against death, and will never help the rich man in the day of judgment.

Tenth Chapter, Twenty-sixth Verse.—"As vinegar to the teeth,





and as smoke to the eyes, so is a sluggard to them that send him." Mr. Henry tells us, this means that a slothful servant is to his master as uneasy and troublesome as vinegar to the teeth, and smoke to the eyes; he provokes his passion as vinegar sets the teeth on edge, and occasions him grief to see his business neglected, and undone, as smoke sets the eyes a-weeping. If we are ever employed to deliver a message, let us, then, always endeavour to do it with care and speed.

Tenth Chapter, Twenty-seventh Verse.—"The fear of the Lord prolongeth days; but the years of the wicked shall be shortened." Some good men die in early life, and some good children die; while some bad men live to old age; but still those who fear God are kept from sinful practices which destroy the health, and cut short the days of many of the wicked; and though some of the wicked live long, yet many of them are hurried away into eternity by their wickedness, as well as in their wickedness.

Eleventh Chapter, Twenty-second Verse.—"As a jewel of gold in a swine's snout, so is a fair woman which is without discretion." This means—my young female readers—that beauty without piety and modesty, is no more to be admired, than the ornament of a jewel if it were stuck into the nose of a swine.

Eleventh Chapter, Twenty-fifth Verse.—"The liberal soul shall be made fat." That is, God will prosper him, which is what is usually meant in Scripture by being made fat. He shall be sure to prosper in his soul, if he may not always prosper in his circumstances, which, notwithstanding his kindness to others, God may not always see to be really good for him.

Twelfth Chapter, Twelfth Verse.—"The wicked desireth the net of evil men." This means, that wicked men like much to be able to imitate other wicked men, in dragging their companions into the ways of sin and ruin.

Thirteenth Chapter, Ninth Verse.—"The light of the righteous rejoiceth: but the lamp of the wicked shall be put out." Light and lamp are words often used in Scripture to mean happiness and prosperity; because a light is a cheerful thing, as prosperity is, and because the lamp is that which holds the cheerful light.





The good man's happiness shall continue, while that of the wicked must be destroyed for ever.

Thirteenth Chapter, Fourteenth Verse.—"The law of the wise is a fountain of life, to depart from the snares of death." The law of the wise is the rule by which they walk, and by which they guide others. The advice they give to themselves and others is their law. And those whom God has made wise are good guides, because they strive to do what God commands, and direct others to do the same. So that their advice is like a full stream flowing from a good fountain, of which we may safely drink without fear of being poisoned.

Fifteenth Chapter, Nineteenth Verse.—"The way of the slothful man is as a hedge of thorns:" that is, he who is idle always pretends that there is some difficulty in the way to prevent him from working, as bad as a hedge of thorns to prevent any one passing through them. I have known idle children like this, who, when told to learn a lesson, have looked very sad, and complained it was so hard, and so long; and I have known some who were so wicked, as to be sadly disposed to be idle, when told to learn or to do anything that more especially related to the service of God: there was always a hedge of thorns in the way.

Twentieth Chapter, Twentieth Verse.—"Whoso curseth his father or his mother, his lamp shall be put out in obscure darkness." This was death under the Jewish law; and though that law is now done away, it is not less wicked to be guilty of such a practice; and, if not deeply repented of, God will punish the rebellious and undutiful child.

Twenty-second Chapter, Eighth Verse.—"He that soweth iniquity, shall reap vanity; and the rod of his anger shall fail." Iniquity is here compared to seed, and he that sows it shall have no good fruit from it. If such an one be in authority—for rod means a mark of power—his authority shall fail. He often loses his power on earth, and God shall punish him in his loss of it at last, when he shall sink into eternal shame.

Twenty-second Chapter, Twenty-eighth Verse.—"Remove not the ancient landmarks which thy fathers have set." You may remember, I told you before about the landmarks in early times,





before there were fields and hedges. These marks were only certain stones, which it might be easy to move, but in doing so a man stole the land of another. This was wicked.

Twenty-second Chapter, Twenty-ninth Verse.—"Seest thou a man diligent in his business? He shall stand before kings; he shall not stand before mean men." This is to teach us, that the industrious are the most likely to become rich and great.

Twenty-third Chapter, Fourth Verse.—"Labour not to be rich." This is not to teach us to be idle; but only to teach us not to spend all our strength in getting rich for this world—not to set our hearts on money, for money, without the love of God, will never make us truly happy.

Twenty-fifth Chapter, Eleventh Verse.—"A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver," or rather, in silver baskets. It means, that when we say wise things, at proper times, our words are as beautiful as fine golden apples served up at table in these silver baskets.

Twenty-sixth Chapter, Third Verse.—"A whip for the horse, a bridle for the ass, and a rod for the fool's back." Wicked men are compared to the horse and the ass, so brutish are they, so unreasonable, so unruly, and not to be governed but by force and fear, so low has sin sunk them—so much below themselves. "A horse,"—says Mr. Henry, whose words I have just mentioned,— "A horse unbroken needs a whip for correction, and an ass a bridle for directing and to check him when he would turn out of the way; so a vicious man, that will not be under the conduct and restraint of religion and reason, ought to be whipped and bridled, to be rebuked severely, and made to smart for what he has done amiss, and to be restrained from offending any more."

Twenty-sixth Chapter, Seventh Verse.—"The legs of the lame are not equal; so is a parable in the mouth of fools." That is, as the lame man cannot walk evenly, so neither can a fool or bad man give good advice; so do not attend to him.

Twenty-sixth Chapter, Fourteenth Verse.—"As the door turneth upon his hinges, so doth the slothful upon his bed." "The door is moved, but not removed." The lazy child loves his bed better than his learning.





Twenty-sixth Chapter, Sixteenth Verse.—"The sluggard is wiser in his own conceit than seven men that can render a reason." Idle people often think themselves wise, and so they never grow wiser.

I could explain to you many more of these Proverbs: however, this may suffice. If you find others you do not understand with ease, yet by thinking about them, and recollecting how these were explained, you will now understand them better. You can also ask your parents and instructors to assist you when you find any difficulty; and above all pray that, with all your knowledge, God would himself teach you by his Holy Spirit, and make you wise unto salvation.

But there is a second class of Proverbs which you will easily understand; these contain many things which I would wish you to think frequently over.

Tenth Chapter, First Verse.—"A wise son maketh a glad father; but a foolish son is the heaviness of his mother." Solomon here reminds us that good children make happy parents.

Twelfth Chapter, Twenty-second Verse.—"Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord." So, you see, that those who lie do not only disgrace themselves, and displease others, but they make themselves abominable to Almighty God.

Thirteenth Chapter, First Verse.—"A wise son heareth his father's instruction." Mr. Matthew Henry was a very good, as well as a very wise man, and he has told us that "there is great hope of those that have a reverence for their parents, and are willing to be advised and admonished by them."

Thirteenth Chapter, Eighteenth Verse.—"Poverty and shame shall be to him that refuseth instruction." Mr. Henry says of him, what has often happened, that "he will become a beggar, and live and die in disgrace: every one will despise him, as foolish, and stubborn, and ungovernable."

Thirteenth Chapter, Twenty-first Verse.—"Evil pursueth sinners." Whenever they go in the ways of sin, misery is sure in the end to follow after, and will certainly overtake them.





Thirteenth Chapter, Twenty-fourth Verse.—"He that spareth the rod hateth his son." You are not to suppose by this that Solomon was a cruel man, and advised parents to be always whipping their children. No: what he intended to say was, that bad children must be corrected to make them good, and that parents who let them do bad things without correcting them, and by a foolish fondness allow them to have their own way, do not in reality love them; but, by their conduct, do as those who care nothing about their happiness, and, indeed, who hate them.

Fourteenth Chapter, Ninth Verse.—"Fools make a mock at sin." We should never laugh at wicked things. If any one says a witty thing in our hearing, we may innocently laugh at it; but if it be wicked wit, and only ridicules what is good, or be expressed in wicked language, none but fools will join in the laugh. Those who love God, if they cannot reprove the sinner, will shudder and turn away, and pray God to forgive him for Christ's sake.

Fifteenth Chapter, First Verse.—"A soft answer turneth away wrath; but grievous words stir up anger." Human nature is very perverse, and young people will sometimes, in a passion, speak very rudely to their parents or teachers. The consequence is, that they make them angry, and they get themselves corrected. Now, if they spoke softly and kindly, they would often get pardoned, even when they have done something very wrong; and those young persons who bear in mind what Solomon says, and try it often, will be sure to find that, generally, a soft answer is the best thing in the world when they are reproved. And so, if their companions quarrel with them, if they only speak softly and persuasively in reply, they will find that most children will listen to them instead of striking them, and that "a soft answer turneth away wrath." But if, on the contrary, they return ill words for ill words, and harsh names for harsh names, they will find that "grievous words stir up anger." Solomon said so a long while ago, and what he said still remains true.

Fifteenth Chapter, Fifth Verse.—"A fool despiseth his father's instruction." Then you perceive that a disobedient child is a fool.

Fifteenth Chapter, Thirty-second Verse.—"He that refuseth





instruction despiseth his own soul." He who will not mind the advice of pious friends, not only shows disrespect and ingratitude to them, but he despises his own soul, as if it were worth nothing; and so plunges that into sin, which a world could not buy, so great is its value.

Sixteenth Chapter, Eighteenth Verse.—"Pride goeth before destruction; and an haughty spirit before a fall." This often happens in this world, but it will be sure to happen in the next. "Pride will have a fall." God hates pride; let us hate it too.

Seventeenth Chapter, Seventeenth Verse.—"A friend loveth at all times." This is what a friend should be; one who will love his friend when he is cast down, as well as when he is raised up; when he becomes poor, as well as when he was rich. Few faithful friends are to be found; but there are some; and if all men truly loved God, there would be more. There is, however, *one friend* who is sure to be faithful, and that is Jesus Christ—he is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. He loves those that love him at all times, and we ought, therefore, at all times to love him.

Seventeenth Chapter, Twenty-fifth Verse.—"A foolish son is a grief to his father, and bitterness to her that bare him." Here we are taught to remember that bad children are a grief to their parents.

Nineteenth Chapter, Twenty-seventh Verse.—"Cease, my son, to hear the instruction that causeth thee to err from the words of knowledge." Here you are advised to run away and not even to hear, much less follow, the advice of those who would lead you into wicked ways.

Twentieth Chapter, Eleventh Verse.—"Even a child is known by his doings, whether his work be pure, and whether it be right." My dear young reader, religion is to be practised while you are young; and as sure as the tree is known by the fruit, so may we know by your doings whether you love God or not, and whether you are in the way to heaven or hell. If you say bad words, keep bad company, and do bad things, what can we judge of you? If you learn your Bibles, love them who serve God, and do what God's word commands you, then we may believe that your doings are such as God loves, and that God will love you; not that your





doings can merit his love—for they are imperfect at best—but then they are a sign that you love him; and he says, “I love them that love me, and they that seek me early shall find me.”

The thirtieth chapter contains the Proverbs of Agur; and the thirty-first of king Lemuel, which is thought to be another name for Solomon.

Young reader, I pray that God may give you his grace to practise these Proverbs, and then you may expect to grow up both wise and happy. Amen.





THE BOOK OF ECCLESIASTES ;

OR,

KING SOLOMON'S THOUGHTS ON THE WORLD.

THE FIRST TO THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

‘Vanity of vanities, saith the preacher ; all is vanity.’—Chap. i. 2.

THIS was king Solomon's opinion of the world. He meant by it, that there is nothing in it which can satisfy the wants of the soul, and that it can never make one truly happy. It has many pleasures to offer us ; but then they will do us no good when we come to die ; and those who live longest will live but a little time in the world. Then, that is the wisest person who is always preparing for the next world. Now, this is what Solomon meant to teach us in writing this book.

He was a rich and powerful king, and if any one could find happiness in this world, such an one as Solomon could. But after he had tried honours, and riches, and pleasures, and learning, and knowledge, of all sorts, he said all was vanity.

He meant by this that all were good for nothing. He was too wise a man not to know that honours are very pleasant things, and riches help to get many enjoyments ; and pleasures have some charms in them ; and learning has its delights ; and knowledge is very useful, and makes us respectable ;—but, then, he





would have us remember, that we have souls which require our care, and that if we neglect to take care of these, and do not pay much attention to their happiness—honours, riches, pleasures, learning, and knowledge, as they must leave us at the grave, will prove in the end “vanity of vanities.”

We must not, then, make our happiness to consist of honours ; nor set our hearts covetously on getting riches ; nor let our time and attention be given away to silly pleasures ; nor study to get human knowledge and learning, while we take no pains to become wise unto salvation.

What I have said is the substance of what Solomon has taught us in this book. But the last chapter is more particularly designed for the notice of the young. In this Solomon writes as if he would say, “Seeing the world is all so vain, and that there is nothing in it that remains long, all its comforts are of a dying sort ;” then I will tell you of the best remedy to cure these evils. This remedy is to serve God while you are young. “Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth.” Now you are healthy and strong, remember him,—and then you will find comfort and support for your mind when you become old and weak. Now, before you go into the world, remember him,—and then you will have comfort dwelling in your mind ready to support it whenever you meet with trouble. Now, while your heart is not filled with the follies of the world, remember him,—and then you will be the more likely to have room in your hearts for God, and true happiness.

Thus, my readers, you will bear Solomon’s advice in mind, and learn by his experience, without suffering the pain of his disappointments.

All the wise Solomon here says, then, ends in this advice, “Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter, Fear God and keep his commandments ; for this is the whole duty of man.” Here you will learn your duty to God and your duty to yourself. God made you to be happy ; and in fearing God and keeping his commandments, you will find true happiness.

Now, dear young reader, make your choice ; for God will, by and by, take notice of what choice you make. “For God shall





bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good or whether it be evil." He knows even the very desires of your heart—secret as they are; and whether you now wish to serve him. If you wish to serve divers lusts and pleasures, these are not the way to serve God; but if you love his word, his people, and his ways, then you will serve him; and in the day of judgment,—or trial of the whole world, for keeping or disobeying the commandments of God,—while many shall grieve that they followed the pleasures of sin, which are but "for a season,"—or for a very little while—you shall rejoice that you chose the way which leads to heaven, where there are "pleasures for evermore."





THE SONG OF SOLOMON ;

OR,

A SACRED POEM ABOUT CHRIST AND THE CHURCH.

THE FIRST TO THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

“The song of songs, which is Solomon’s.”—Chap. i. 1.

THIS book is what is called an allegory. An allegory is rather difficult to understand. It signifies a writing, the language of which seems to represent one thing, but really it means another. The celebrated *Pilgrim’s Progress*, by John Bunyan, is an allegory ; and while it describes a journey over hills, vales, and water, it signifies all that happens to the Christian, while he is in this world, and on his way to heaven.

The Song of Solomon signifies the love of Christ to his church or people, and the love of his church or people to him ; and, being poetry, it has a number of comparisons with objects in nature and art, like the Psalms. The sun, the moon, the lily, the rose, the apple-tree, the beautiful hart, the majestic horse, the fragrant spices, the precious stones, the lofty towers, the splendid army,—and many objects of superior excellency or grandeur in Eastern countries,—are all employed by which to express the language of love and admiration. We can never think too highly of the blessed Saviour, and we know how tenderly he loves his church.





JEREMIAH BEFORE THE KING.



RIVER CHEBAR, SCENE OF EZEKIEL'S VISION.



Having said thus much, I do not think it necessary to say much more. I do not suppose you could well understand this book, were I to attempt to explain it to you. When you grow older, if you grow up to love the divine Saviour, you will then find what I have already said, to be of some use to you, to help you the better to understand its meaning, into which, I hope, you will be fully able to enter.

I shall just add, that Christ, in this book, is represented as the bridegroom or husband of his church, and the church as the bride or wife; just as, in other places, God is sometimes called a Father, and we his sons and daughters; and so, we learn that the tender love which exists between affectionate fathers and mothers, is a faint resemblance of that devotedness of heart which the church of Christ have towards him, who is "altogether lovely," and that everlasting love which he bears to his church.

On account of the excellency and purity of the subject about which Solomon here sings, this poetical book is called "The Song of Songs," which means, "The most excellent Song;" a song that is far better than all other songs. To sing the praises of Jesus is employment in which angels have been engaged; and his praises will be the everlasting songs of heaven.

Let me remind you, before I conclude my remarks on this book, that the fruits, the herbs, the dress, the adornments, the buildings, and all the manners and customs mentioned in this sacred poem, are Eastern, and, therefore, many of them differ very much from what we see in this country.





THE FOUR GREATER PROPHETS.

THE BOOK OF THE PROPHET ISAIAH ;

OR,

OF EVENTS FORETOLD BY HIM WHICH WERE TO COME TO PASS
AND HAVE SINCE HAPPENED.

THE FIRST TO THE SIXTY-SIXTH CHAPTER.

“For I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done.”—Chap. xlv. 9, 10.

PROPHECIES are words that tell us of things that are to come to pass a great while before they take place; and prophets are those who speak these words. There are wicked people who pretend to know what will happen to others, and people who, from foolish curiosity, pay them to tell them their fortunes. He who gives the money in this case is a fool, and he who takes it is a rogue. For none but a fool can ever suppose that a human creature like himself, can know any thing more about future things that will happen to him, than he himself can; and none but a





rogue will take money for cheating another,—pretending to do what he cannot do.

But God knows all things, past, present, and to come; and he could, if he pleased, make us know every thing that is to happen in the world. In old times he did teach many such things to some men who were called prophets, and he especially used them to warn Israel and Judah of what would come upon them if they were wicked. Many of these things have since happened. Some things, he also told them, which have not yet come to pass; but we believe that they will, for this reason,—because many things which they said would happen hundreds of years after they should be dead, have really taken place.

These prophecies, among other uses, serve to show us that the Scriptures are of no human origin, but are really the word of God: because, as I said before, none but God can possibly know what is to happen many hundreds of years to come. They prove that “every word of God is true,” and, as his words have come to pass, so all that remain to be fulfilled shall take place; and we may cheerfully hope for all the blessings of the righteous, if we walk in his holy ways, or fearfully dread all the punishments of the ungodly, if we wander far from them.

The prophets most frequently spoke in what is called figurative language, and so they used figures or similitudes to express things which were to happen; and sometimes they were ordered to do so by signs, and at other times by plain words. As they prophesied under a divine influence, or the power of God's Spirit affecting their minds, they could not always even know themselves what was fully meant by their prophecies. By speaking in obscure language, while they said enough to warn the sinful people whom they addressed, they so concealed the bringing about the events which they foretold, that no human means could be used to try and baffle them—though, had they spoken plainer, no device could, indeed, have succeeded against the determination of God. Kings, queens, and magistrates, are frequently represented by the sun, moon, and stars; kingdoms and cities, by mountains and hills; God's faithful covenant, or engagements to bless his people, by the promise of marriage, in which the hus-





band or wife agree to be faithful to each other as long as they live; and idolatry by the most wicked and polluted deeds in society.

Some of the prophets spoke of their prophecies as "the burden of the Lord;" perhaps, because they were a great weight upon their spirits, when they plainly foretold heavy punishments to be inflicted on the people of God, on account of their sins; or perhaps, because they pronounced a heavy doom, which should press down the guilty people, as a burden does an animal or a man, when it is too weighty for him to bear.

Most of the prophets lived during the times of the kings of Israel and Judah, of which you have read. There were other prophets besides those whose writings are here gathered together; but all were not commanded to write what they wrote, but only those who foretold things which were far distant.

The prophets are not arranged in the order in which they wrote but rather according to the extent of their prophecies, the large books being placed first.

The books of the prophets are sixteen in number. Four of these are called the Greater Prophets, not because they were more important than the rest, but because their prophecies are more extensive. The remaining twelve are, on account of their containing less, called the Minor Prophets.

The Jews were privileged with prophets to warn them against the consequences of sin, and to stir them up to serve the true God, from the time they left Egypt, to the time when they were carried away captives into Babylon, which occupied a period of nine hundred years.

But the written prophecies occupy a period of only three hundred and fifty-six years. The order in which the prophets wrote, will be seen by the following table:—





NAME OF THE PROPHET	Began to prophesy about the year of the world	In the Reigns of the following Kings of Judah and Israel.		Prophesied about the same time with
1. HOSEA .	3194	{ Uziah Jotham Ahaz Hezekiah . . . }	Jeroboam II.	
2. AMOS . .	3219	Uzziah	Jeroboam II.	
3. ISAIAH .	3236	{ Uziah Jotham Ahaz Hezekiah }		
4. JONAH .	. .	Manasseh.	{ Joash. Jeroboam II	
5. MICAH .	3246	{ Jotham Ahaz Hezekiah . . . }		Isaiah.
6. NAHUM .	3291	Hezekiah		Isaiah.
7. JEREMIAH	3375	{ Josiah. Jehoaz. Jehoiakim.		
8. ZEPHANIAH	3381	Josiah		Jeremiah.
9. JOEL . .	. .	Josiah.		
10. DANIEL .	3398	{ Taken a Captive into Chaldæa in the reign of Je- hoiakim, and pro- phesied during the captivity.		
11. HABAKKUK	3394	Jehoiakim.		Jeremiah.
12. EZEKIEL .	3409	{ During part of the captivity.		
13. OBADIAH.	3414	{ After the taking of Jerusalem.		
14. HAGGAI .	3484	{ Born during the captivity . . }		Zechariah.
15. ZECHARIAH	. .			Haggai.
16. MALACHI .	. .	{ The last of the Jewish prophets }	. . .	{ Prophe- si'd af- ter the death of Nehemiah.





You must not be surprised if you find other dates and times given by some writers, to the periods in which the prophets lived ; for as some of them can only be imagined from the contents of their prophecies, every one is left to have his own opinion on these matters.

The prophet Isaiah warned the Jewish people of their wickedness ; exhorted them to repentance ; and comforted those, who truly loved God, with an assurance of better times, and the future coming and triumphs of Jesus Christ, the true Messiah or anointed Saviour.

Several very remarkable predictions appear in this prophecy. Let us just look at two.

The first relates to the captivity of the Jews in Babylon, on account of their sins, and their deliverance by Cyrus the Persian conqueror. You will find this prophecy in the forty-fifth chapter of Isaiah. " Thus saith the Lord to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have holden, to subdue nations before him ; and I will loose the loins of kings, to open before him the two-leaved gates ; and the gates shall not be shut ; I will go before thee, and make the crooked places straight : I will break in pieces the gates of brass, and cut in sunder the bars of iron : and I will give thee the treasures of darkness, and hidden riches of secret places, that thou mayest know that I, the Lord, which call thee by thy name, am the God of Israel. For Jacob, my servant's sake, and Israel, mine elect, I have even called thee by thy name : I have sur-named thee, although thou hast not known me."

In this prophecy, Cyrus the Conqueror is called by his name, as much as two hundred years before he was born. He was called the Lord's anointed, because he was raised up to be a king by the particular design of God, in order that he might deliver the penitent Jews out of their captivity in Babylon. By holding his right hand is meant God's giving him help and power,—the right hand usually meaning power in the prophecies, and frequently elsewhere. By loosing the loins of kings before him, is meant weakening them ; and Cyrus overcame Crœsus the rich king of Lydia, and Belshazzar the powerful king of Babylon. The prediction of opening the two-leaved gates, and that the gates should not be





shut, was wonderfully fulfilled at Babylon. This city was so strong that Cyrus could never have taken it; but, the night in which he did take it, the gates of brass were carelessly left open, whilst the king and his people were feasting and drinking, fancying themselves in perfect security. So God's word, by Isaiah, came true. Making crooked places straight, is an expression used in various places, and means the overcoming of difficulties. The words which mention the breaking in pieces the gates of brass and cutting in sunder the bars of iron, well describe the strength of the gates of Babylon, which God opened to Cyrus. There were no less than a hundred gates in the wall which surrounded Babylon, and these were all made of solid brass; twenty-five being on each side of the city; and these, to make them as secure as possible, were all barred with iron.

Those who serve God shall not go unrewarded. Though Cyrus does not appear to have been a good man, yet as he did good and fulfilled the purpose of God in releasing the Israelites from Babylon, God rewarded him by giving him "the treasures of darkness;" by which are meant much gold and silver which come out of the dark bowels of the earth, and, perhaps, also much which were hidden and laid up in concealed places, by those princes whom he conquered. Pliny, a Roman writer, says, that when Cyrus conquered Asia, he carried away thirty-four thousand pounds of gold, besides golden vessels and other treasures. Babylon was a rich and powerful city; being forty-five miles round, which is almost twice the circumference of New York; its kings had long been gathering wealth from their large conquests, and all these spoils now fell to the share of Cyrus.

The wonderful prophecy of Isaiah, is said, by a very ancient writer, to have been read by Cyrus; and, if so, it must greatly have encouraged him, and induced him to help the suffering Jews.

The second remarkable portion of this prophecy relates to the sufferings of Christ. In the fifty-third chapter of his prophecies, Isaiah speaks of him as making his appearance as "a root out of a dry ground, having no form nor comeliness in him;" that is, looking mean as a withered plant, which in that state has lost all





its beauty and verdure. So He "who was rich, for our sakes became poor." He tells us, "He is despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief." So, indeed, was Jesus of Nazareth, when he came into the world to save sinners; "He came unto his own" people, "and his own received him not." "Surely," says the prophet, "he hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows." "We did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted." "He was wounded for our transgressions, and bruised for our iniquities;" "and with his stripes," or through his sufferings, "we are healed;"—we sinners, wounded to death by sin, are made whole. "He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth." No other than Jesus has borne our griefs—no other was ever wounded for our transgressions. "The Lamb of God" went meekly to the slaughter for us. This prophecy, then, plainly points out the suffering Jesus, and all the manner, and end, and design of his sufferings; and those who love Jesus, love to meditate upon it with the greatest delight, because it shows them his love in saving sinners. Yet, at the same time, they must be affected with sorrow in reading it, to think how the sins of man caused the Redeemer to suffer.

Isaiah lived seven hundred and seventy years before Christ, of whom he so particularly wrote. Our Lord greatly honoured this prophet by preaching his first sermon out of this prophecy.

2. JEREMIAH lived nearer the time of which he prophesied than did Isaiah. He saw the approaching decline of his country, and wept over it, while, as God taught him, he warned the people, and urged them to repent. He lived to see what he threatened come to pass—the destruction of the city and temple of Jerusalem, and the captivity in Babylon. He was persecuted very much for his faithful prophecies, and he was contradicted, as if he had been a false prophet. As a sign of the bringing of the people under the dominion of Nebuchadnezzar, Jeremiah wore a yoke around his neck. This yoke a false prophet named Hananiah tore off, and broke it, and prophesied of the speedy restoration of the





Jews from their captivity. For this act God instructed Jeremiah to pronounce his speedy death, and Hananiah died the same year.

After the princes and people were carried away captive with Jeconiah, Jeremiah wrote to them to comfort them ; and he told them that, in seventy years' time, they should be restored, if they repented and turned unto God, and, till that time, they ought to submit themselves to God's decree, and make themselves as contented as they could in their captivity ; for it is, indeed, of no use to fight against God. Jeremiah also told them, how God would punish all the false prophets who should spring up among them in Babylon, and prophesy their more speedy delivery.

This prophet used signs as well as words. He not only wore a yoke to show the captivity of his people, but he took an earthen vessel and broke it before the priests and elders of the people, as a token of the breaking to pieces of the city and government of Jerusalem ; and he said, "Thus saith the Lord of hosts, Even so will I break this people and this city, as one breaketh a potter's vessel that cannot be made whole again." And he told the people that, because they had burned incense to false gods, and shed the blood of innocents—of young children and poor babes whom they had offered in their cruel sacrifices—and "built high places of Baal, to burn their sons with fire for burnt-offerings unto Baal," he would "cause the people to fall by the sword, and make their city desolate and a hissing," or despised and hissed at ; and he would cause the people who had burned their sons and daughters, in their own cruel pleasure, even to eat their flesh, when it should be against their will, when they should be starved by being besieged and unable to get any other food, on account of the vigilance of their enemies. When Jerusalem was taken by the Chaldeans, this threatening came to pass ; but it was most dreadfully fulfilled when it was finally taken by the Romans, some time after the restoration by Cyrus, and a woman was detected eating her own son.

See what dreadful punishment the Jews brought upon themselves by their wickedness ; and fear to offend against a God who hates all kinds of sin.





Pashur, who was a son of one of the priests, was so enraged at Jeremiah for prophesying such punishments for wicked Judah, that he smote him, and put him into the stocks.

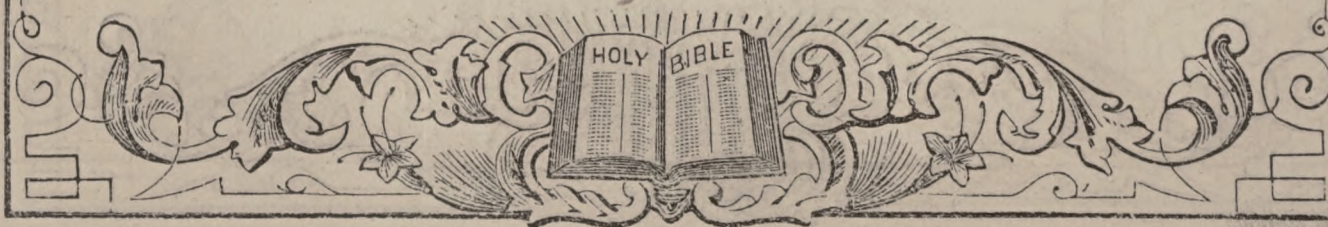
When Nebuchadnezzar was besieging Jerusalem, Jeremiah was imprisoned. When the siege was suspended, and Nebuchadnezzar had retired, Jeremiah was released; but he foretold that Nebuchadnezzar would return, and burn the city to ashes. At this time he tried to escape from Jerusalem, but he was discovered by an officer as he was going out of one of the gates, and was again thrown into prison, till the king ordered him to be set at liberty.

Nebuchadnezzar did return; and as the chief men of the city thought that Jeremiah's prophecies discouraged the people, they got leave from Zedekiah to cast him once more into prison; and they let him down with ropes, into a muddy well, where he must soon have perished, if God had not inclined the heart of Zedekiah to release him; and he was kept prisoner in the palace till Jerusalem was taken.

A little before this last fatal event, Zedekiah asked Jeremiah what he should do. And Jeremiah, being instructed of the Lord, told him to give himself up to Nebuchadnezzar, and it would be better for him, and his family, and for the safety of the city; but, if he persisted in opposing the Chaldeans, he and his family would be ruined, and the city wholly destroyed.

Zedekiah now respected the prophet, yet did not quite like his advice, and so following his own counsel, instead of believing the word of the Lord by Jeremiah, he tried to escape from Jerusalem by night, but was pursued by the Chaldeans, and, being taken, his sons and nobles were put to death, his own eyes were put out, he was carried to Babylon bound in chains, and the city was burned.

Jeremiah was taken among the captives, but, by order of Nebuchadnezzar, he was set free, and had the choice of going to Babylon or staying in Judea. Jeremiah chose to stay in his country. Here he was quiet till the rebellion against Gedaliah, Nebuchadnezzar's officer. When Jeremiah was then consulted whether it would be safest to stay in Judea or escape into Egypt, the prophet advised the people to stay. They, however, thought pro-





per to refuse his advice, and even obliged him to go with them. Here he prophesied also against the King of Egypt.

Though Babylon was now in all its glory, yet the prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah both foretold its future destruction. It was impossible for any human being—unless God taught him—to foretel that so mighty a city and strong a power, should at last perish and come to nothing. Yet such is now the condition of Babylon. Its very name is perished, except in history, which informs us that it was, and that it is not.

In the thirteenth and fourteenth chapters of Isaiah, and in the fiftieth and fifty-first chapters of Jeremiah, you will read prophecies of Babylon, “the glory of kingdoms,” that it should never more be inhabited—that wild beasts should dwell there—that it should be a dry land and a desert—and much more of the same and now, for seventeen hundred years, it has been nothing but a heap of ruins. Its canals are all dried up; fragments of bricks and tiles, which once formed its splendid buildings, are all that remain of their grandeur. Major Keppel, a noted traveller, who visited the spot in 1825, was struck with the wonderful truth of the descriptions given of its desolation by Isaiah and Jeremiah, so exactly have they described all that has happened to Babylon. Mr. Layard and other travellers confirm his testimony. There are many dens of wild beasts in various parts about the place, and it is the unmolested retreat of jackals, hyenas, and other noxious animals. The majestic river Euphrates still flows on, the willows grow on the banks, on which the Israelitish captives hung their harps; but the city, and the palaces, and the fields, and gardens, which once adorned it, have for ever disappeared! So at last shall the earth, and all the works that are in it, be burnt up, on account of the sinfulness of its inhabitants; for “every word of God is true.”

The LAMENTATIONS of JEREMIAH are closely connected with his prophecies, and seem to have been written after the destruction of Jerusalem, and with a design to bring the people to





a state of repentance on account of their sins, which had been the cause of their desolate condition.

3. **EZEKIEL** was of the race of the priests. He was carried away captive into Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar, with Jehoiachin, king of Judah, of whom you have read at the end of the reigns of the kings. He prophesied twenty years. Ezekiel, as well as Isaiah and Jeremiah, prophesied of the destruction of Jerusalem, and also signified it by various signs, one of which was the cutting off his hair, which he divided into three parts; one part he burned, another he cut in pieces with a sword, and a third he scattered to the wind.

Ezekiel also foretold the ruin of many nations and cities which had been enemies to the people of God, and were base idolaters, pronouncing the doom of the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Edomites, and Philistines; and of Tyre, Sidon, and Egypt.

Let us just notice, in particular, Tyre and Egypt.

Tyre was the most celebrated city of Phenicia. No city in the world equalled it for commerce. There were, however, two Tyres, both of which are included in the same name, and both of which met with the same ruinous end. One of these was connected with the main land. It appears to have been a rocky and strong little island closely adjoining it. It held out thirteen years against Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, before he could take it; and, when he had got possession of it, he found nothing but the bare walls, for the inhabitants had removed to their new Tyre. Some time after, Alexander the Great conquered this; and, being enraged at the difficulty of getting at it, he planned a singular scheme to accomplish his purpose. The remains of the old Tyre, as left by Nebuchadnezzar, two hundred and forty years before, were employed to make a pathway to the new Tyre, which was half a mile from the shore. The difficulty in doing this was great; but Alexander accomplished it; and having taken the wealthy city, he so completely destroyed it, that the exact spot on which it stood is now unknown. Now, but ten or a dozen inhabitants are there to be seen, and these are only poor fishermen.





These events were exactly foretold by the prophet Ezekiel. In the twenty-sixth chapter he predicts the attack by Nebuchadrezzar, or Nebuchadnezzar, thus describing him by name, as Isaiah did Cyrus, and he tells of all that he should do; adding, in the words of the Lord, "I will make thee like the top of a rock: thou shalt be a place to spread nets upon; thou shalt be built no more; for I the Lord have spoken it, saith the Lord God." The two chapters which follow also describe the ruin of Tyre in a most remarkable manner. Has not God then declared, "from ancient times, the things that" were "not yet done?" What a proof that the Bible is the word of God! O, let us read it with care, and humbly pray God to make us understand all that relates to our souls and our Saviour, that so we may be "wise unto salvation, through faith that is in Christ Jesus!"

Let us now make our remarks on Egypt. Egypt was once a mighty nation. No nation was more learned and skilled in arts. Some of its monuments even remain to this day, and its huge pyramids are the wonders of the world. There are three of them, in particular, which attract notice. They are supposed to have been the tombs of some kings. The largest of these is a great deal higher than St. Paul's cathedral, and is reckoned to have been built with six millions of tons of stone!—a quantity large enough to build a wall completely round the whole of France, which should be twice the height of a man, and a foot broad; which is no short distance, for France contains above two hundred thousand square miles of land! The Egyptians had many grand cities, and had made great conquests in neighbouring countries.

But Ezekiel, in the words of the Lord, prophesied of this nation, which had made Israel slaves, and been a great foe to the people of God, "It shall be the basest of the kingdoms, neither shall it exalt itself any more above the nations; for I will diminish them, that they shall no more rule over the nations."

This has come to pass. The Egyptians are the most enslaved of people. Tyrants rule over them. There are a very few men who are great, and all the rest are miserably poor, and ignorant, and wretched, and subject to the most cruel and oppressive lords. The ruins of splendid temples and palaces yet remain, but nothing





but mud-walled cottages surround them. At this moment there is a ruler who has gained some power; but Egypt is still among the basest of the nations. It was two thousand four hundred years ago, when the prophet foretold what it should be, and when it was most unlike what it now is. Who taught Ezekiel to describe its present condition twenty-five hundred years ago, when it was prosperous and powerful? The answer must be—God, to whom there is none like, “declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done.”

But let us now proceed to the next prophecy.

4. DANIEL.—Daniel was one of the captives carried away into Babylon with Jehoiachin, as you read at the end of the Books of Kings. He was one of the royal blood of Judah.

Daniel prophesied, in a remarkable manner, of the ruin of the four great monarchies of the world, even before they had all risen to power: that is, the Babylonian; the Medes and Persians—which were united in Cyrus, his father being a Persian and his mother a Mede, and to whom, after his uncle's death, the whole monarchy fell by right; the Macedonian, or Grecian; and the Roman. These arose to greatness one after the other, and each new one swallowed up the old. The Babylonians were destroyed by the Medes and Persians; the Medes and Persians by the Greeks; and the Greeks by the Romans.

This explanation describes an image which Nebuchadnezzar saw in a dream, and which was a prophecy of what should happen in the kingdoms of the world, till the kingdom of the Messiah, or Christ, should be set up in the world, and he should reign over the hearts of men.

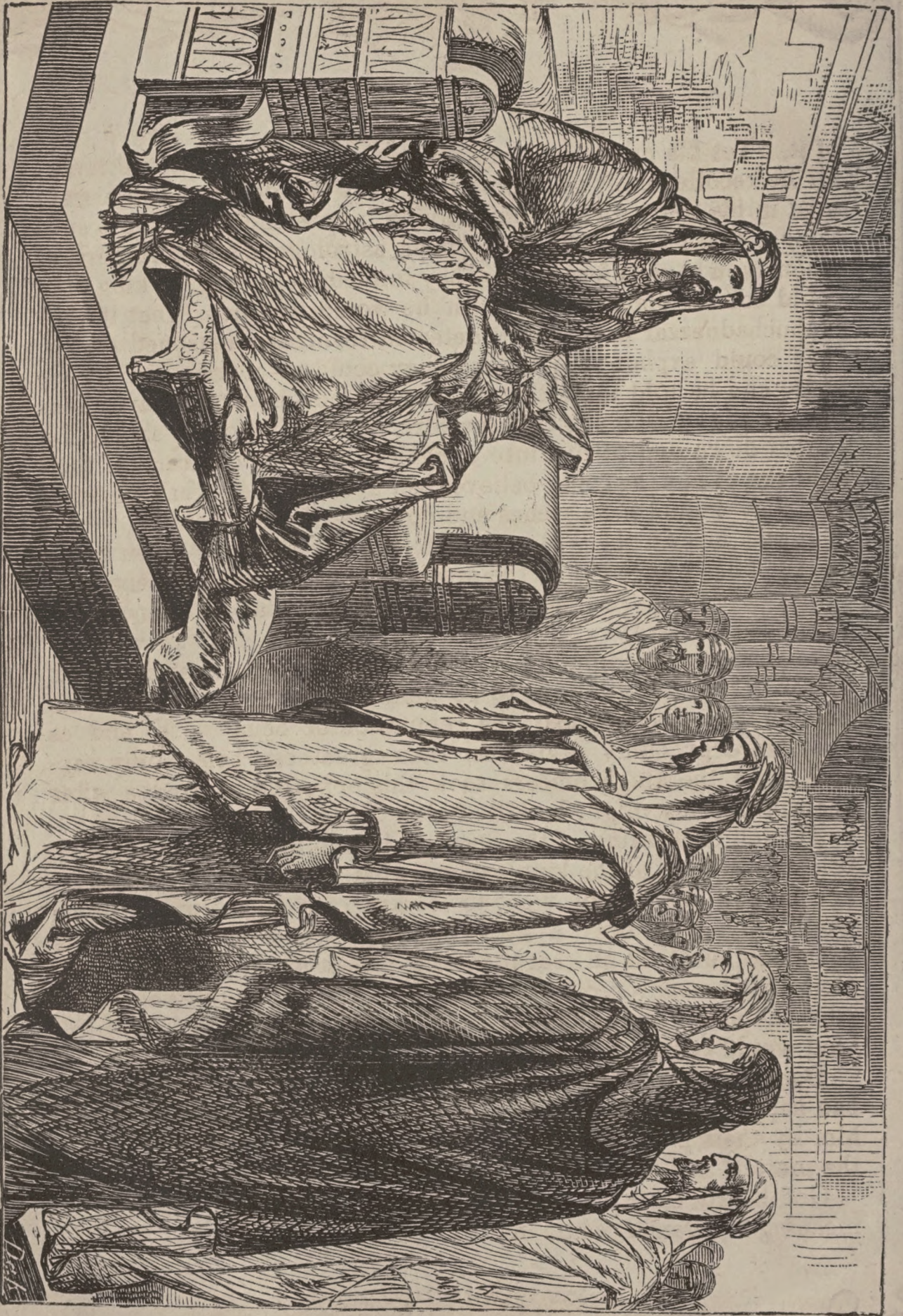
The interpretation of this dream brought Daniel into great honour and notice in the Babylonian court. God made the Babylonian king to dream of these extraordinary things to bring about his great designs.

We often forget a dream after we have dreamed it, and yet we just recollect that it was about something very remarkable. Nebuchadnezzar, after he had had this dream, forgot the particulars





DANIEL AND THE HEBREW YOUTH



DANIEL AND HIS COMPANIONS BEFORE NEBUCHADNEZZAR.



of it. Yet his mind was very uneasy about what it could mean, for he recollected it was something very wonderful. There were men in his court who got their living by pretending to know such things; these were called magicians, astrologers, and sorcerers, of whom you have before read. They immediately told the king they could soon explain his dream, if he would tell them what it was. Nebuchadnezzar now wisely detected them, and reasoned that if they could explain the dream, they could of course find it out also; and he told them that, if they did not, he would have them cut in pieces as a set of impostors, and their houses should be pulled down and turned into dunghills. On the contrary, if they told the dream, he could believe their ability to tell what it meant, and they should have riches and honours for their reward.

It was in vain the wise men replied, that the task given them by the king was beyond the art of man; the king was enraged, either that they had deceived him by their false pretences, or, if he supposed they could reveal the matter, that they obstinately refused to explain it to him. He, therefore, kept his word, and ordered the wise men to be slain. As Daniel and his Jewish companions at court had the reputation of being wise, and as they were probably envied for their greatness, being only captive Jews, the king's officers took this opportunity to seek after them, that they might be killed also.

Daniel, on hearing of the decree, and inquiring into the cause, told the captain of the king's guard, that the king was too hasty; and he and the captain went to the king, and told him that if he would give him only a little time, he would show the whole dream to him, and all that it meant. Such was Daniel's trust in God, that he ventured to promise the king, on the full belief that when he asked for wisdom from God, to make out the difficulty, God would reveal it.

Daniel then went to his house, and he told his companions what had happened, and begged Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, to aid him by their prayers, so that he might have the help of God in the matter, and that they might not all perish with the wise men.

God heard their prayers, and made known the dream and its meaning to Daniel, while he was asleep. And Daniel blessed





God for hearing and teaching him. So ought we ever to praise God with new earnestness, whenever he bestows upon us new favours.

Then Daniel went into the king, and explained all that he wanted to know. When Daniel related the dream, then the king remembered it, and he believed Daniel's explanation. And he made Daniel ruler over the whole province of Babylon, and chief of the wise men.

You must remember that the Babylonians were idol worshippers; and Nebuchadnezzar in his pride set up a very fine image of gold for the people to worship. This image, from the description given of it, must have been fifteen times larger than a man. So the king commanded all the great men every where throughout the provinces of his vast dominions to assemble together at a certain time; and he made proclamation by a herald, that, at a certain signal made by his bands of music, every one should fall down and worship this golden image. The command was obeyed, and men of all nations and languages who had been brought under his dominion, fell down before the idol: for, if any refused so to do, they were to be cast into a burning fiery furnace for their disobedience.

Now Daniel and his three companions, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, being Jews placed in situations of eminence, were likely to be sufferers by the king's decree, for, being sincere followers of the true God, they would not worship a dumb idol. Daniel, however, escaped at this time; he was either too much in favour for any to venture to accuse him, or else he was engaged at a distance on business of sufficient importance to excuse his absence. Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, could not escape, and they attended with the rest, in obedience to the king's orders; but, when the multitude fell down before the idol, they did not.

Some of the Chaldeans, who were jealous of the honours of these men who were exalted with Daniel, went and told the king, that the Jews, whom he had exalted, had not regarded him. This was so told, as to make their disobedience appear worse, after the rank he had conferred upon them.

Then Nebuchadnezzar sent in a rage for these men, and asked





them, "Is it true, O Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego; do not ye serve my gods, nor worship the golden image which I have set up?" You will observe here, that the king does not call them by the names we saw before, but by three other names: for, when he bestowed honours upon them, he gave them new names, as Pharaoh did to Joseph, and as you remember to have been told was usually done by Eastern princes when they dignified any persons. This custom still exists in all Eastern countries, and, when a man is honored by any of the kings, he at once receives a new name, usually significant of the circumstances of his promotion. The same thing is done in Europe when a man is raised to the peerage. Daniel had also the same honour granted to him with his companions, and was called Belteshazzar. Daniel will, however, be always mentioned in his old Jewish name, by which he is best known, but the others, in the rest of this sacred story, by their Chaldee names, as the story drops their Jewish ones.

Nebuchadnezzar now told Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, that he would give them another trial, and ordered the ceremony to take place again; and that if they then persisted in their refusal to worship his fine image, they should be burned to death that very hour; and then he haughtily dared to say, "Who is that God that shall deliver you out of my hands?" These men truly loved God, and so they feared him above Nebuchadnezzar. And they told the king that they would not serve his God, and that if he chose to cast them into the furnace, their God was able to save them.

Nebuchadnezzar's pride was now mortified, and in his fury he desired the furnace to be made as hot as it was possible to make it. Then he had the three good men bound hand and foot, and cast into the blazing furnace. The men who cast them in, might perhaps be their great enemies who had accused them, and were forward to make an end of them; but they scarcely saw them in the furnace, for they instantly perished, with only the heat of the flames proceeding from it, before they had time to draw back.

In a few moments Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, were observed by the king walking in the midst of the furnace, quite





unhurt. A fourth person was walking with them, whom he supposed—perhaps from some particular appearance—to be a divine person, and he called him—perhaps being convinced by a divine light of the mind just at the moment—by the name of the Son of God, or an angel of God.

Immediately this lion was changed into a lamb; and he went nearer to the furnace, and spoke to the three persecuted men, “and said, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, ye servants of the Most High God, come forth and come hither.” So they came out of the furnace, before all the rulers and people, without one single injury either to their clothes, or even a hair of their heads!

Nebuchadnezzar was then sure that the God of the Jews was the true God; and he made a decree, that if the people did not in future serve the true God, they should all be cut in pieces.

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, were also raised by the king to greater power, so that what their enemies, and the enemies of God had desired, not only failed, but turned out for their good, and that of their people, who would no more be in danger of insult and suffering on account of their holy religion.

In the fourth chapter of this prophecy, we find a remarkable proclamation or letter sent by Nebuchadnezzar to all his subjects in all the provinces under his dominion. He mentions a wonderful dream which he had, and which greatly alarmed him. So he sent for his wise men, who showed themselves to be as foolish as they were before; for, though he told them the dream, they could not even contrive any thing like an explanation. Then he recollected Daniel, and sent for him. It is not unlikely that he was not sent for at first, on account of his being at some distance looking after his public duties. Then he told him his dream, about seeing a tall, strong, beautiful, fruitful, and shady tree, and that he saw one descend from heaven and order the tree to be cut down; but the stump was to be spared, and to be wet with the dew of heaven, and there it was to remain with the beasts of the field. And this tree had got a man's heart, which was to be changed into that of a beast.

Daniel then told the king, that the tall and strong tree, with





spreading branches, was a sign of himself, who had become a great and mighty king, and ruled over many people and nations. That the cutting down of the tree showed how God would humble him; and its being wet with the dew, and the stump remaining with the beasts, was to point out that he should dwell under the dew of heaven among the beasts of the field, where he should eat grass like the oxen.

Twelve months after this, as he was walking about his palace, and most likely on its roof, he looked proudly over his grand city, and he said to himself, "Is not this great Babylon, that I have built?" And he thought more of his own pomp and glory than he did of Almighty God, the King of kings. Then a voice from heaven spoke to him, "O King Nebuchadnezzar, the kingdom is departed from thee! And they shall drive thee from men, and thy dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field; they shall make thee to eat grass as oxen, and seven times shall pass over thee, until thou know that the Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will. The same hour was the thing fulfilled upon Nebuchadnezzar; and he was driven from men, and did eat grass as oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven, till his hairs were grown like eagle's feathers, and his nails like bird's claws."

He seems to have been seized with a wonderful kind of madness, and to have rushed out into the fields and woods, and there to have lived among the beasts; and so he remained till God chose to restore him, when he related to his people his restoration, and all that had happened to him.

This madness brought him to his right mind, from which we may hope he never turned back; and he who was once so proud and lordly says, "Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise, and extol, and honour the King of Heaven, all whose works are truth, and his ways judgment; and those that walk in pride he is able to abase."

This account shows us how God hates pride, and how easy it is for him, when he pleases, to make the proudest humble.

This prophecy is very interesting, for in the next chapter we have an account of one of Nebuchadnezzar's successors. He was





not, indeed, the king that reigned directly after him, for there were three others before this Belshazzar came to the throne, as we learn from some very old historians; but these three had very short reigns of two years, four years, and nine months. The first was the son of Nebuchadnezzar, and was called Evil-Merodach, and the other two were usurpers. Belshazzar was of the lawful line, and was grandson of Nebuchadnezzar.

This was the last king of Babylon: and we learn how he lost it. He made a great feast, and, being a despiser of the true God, he sent for the sacred vessels which Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the temple at Jerusalem; and, with his princes, wives, and concubines, he drank to the honour of his "gods of gold and of silver, of brass, of iron, of wood, and of stone."

Cyrus was at this time besieging the city; but the gates and walls being strong, with plenty of water all round it, and there being provision enough for twenty years within it, Belshazzar did not suppose it possible that it could be taken; so he enjoyed himself in his profane doings, and was getting drunk out of the Jewish vessels which had been consecrated to the service of the true God.

In the midst of his mirth and cups, he suddenly saw a hand which was writing upon a wall on which he cast his eye. He was struck with astonishment and dread. It was marvellous. But what could the secret words mean which the wonderful hand wrote? Why was he frightened? Why should he not have supposed that the hand was writing something good for him—some news about the destruction of his enemy, or some advice how to defeat them? No, my young reader, not so. We say, "A guilty conscience needs no accuser." So it was with this king. He felt he was doing something that was bad, and he now dreaded to know what was to happen to him. He changed colour, was distressed in his mind, and he trembled so violently that his knees "even smote one against another."

He cried aloud to bring the wise men; he was so much in haste that he would not send for them in the usual quiet way. They came, but they could not read the writing. He and his lords were then more alarmed. The queen, who was not at the feast, having



soon heard of the wonderful event, hastened directly to the king, and told him that Daniel could make out the writing, for he had shown such skill in the days of Nebuchadnezzar that he had made him master of the wise men.



The king lost no time in sending for Daniel; and when he came in, he offered him rewards if he would explain the writing; but Daniel refused the rewards, and began to explain the secret words.

He faithfully told the king of all that had happened to his grandfather Nebuchadnezzar; that he had not learned wisdom by his grandfather's misfortunes, but had also lifted up his rebellious heart against "the Lord of Heaven," and had abused the vessels





of the temple, and insulted the God by whose power he drew every breath he breathed. Then he explained the words which were written on the wall, "MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN,"—that God had ended his kingdom, and given it to the Medes and Persians.

Belshazzar, instead of being enraged at such a threat, felt conscious that he had displeased the Almighty God, and that Daniel had spoken the truth; and though Daniel had refused the reward, he bestowed the last honour upon him; and at his command "they clothed Daniel with scarlet, and put a chain of gold about his neck, and made a proclamation concerning him, that he should be the third ruler in the kingdom."

That very night the city was taken by Darius the Mede, who was besieging it along with Cyrus his nephew, and Belshazzar was slain. Thus fell Babylon, the scourge of Judah, as God had foretold by his prophets.

Darius the Mede having, by conquest, come into possession of the empire of Babylon, found it necessary to place no less than "a hundred and twenty princes" in the different districts, that they might keep the people in order, and procure the king's taxes. That these princes might not cheat him nor oppress the people, he also appointed three great men to preside over them, and see that they all did their duty. Of these three presidents, Daniel was the first. The king saw that he was a man of "an excellent spirit," honest, and faithful; and he, therefore, promoted him to the highest rank.

Perhaps the integrity of Daniel, who would not countenance those who were under him in doing wrong, as well as his eminence in being placed over so many others, had made the princes dislike him; they could have no other reason for trying to do him injury. So they laid their heads together to find some fault in him; but he was so wise and prudent, that they could accuse him of nothing. He was, however, known to be very strict in worshipping his God, and here they contrived a plan to do him harm. They agreed to make a law, that no one should petition any God or man for thirty days, save the king Darius: him only they might petition; and if any one should break that law, he should be cast into a den of





lions, to be torn to pieces and devoured by them. The proud monarch took this for a great compliment, and signed the decree, by which it became an unchangeable law.

Now Daniel was accustomed to pray three times a day, with his window open and his face toward Jerusalem, according to Solomon's prayer to God at the dedication of the temple, that if his people should be made captives, and should pray from the land of their captivity with their eyes towards Jerusalem, where God had built his house, that then he would hear and maintain their cause. So he did not mind the king's decree, but opened his window and prayed as usual: he might, certainly, have done so in a less public manner; but, as he had been seen before, he would not show signs of fear, or dishonour his God by having it supposed that he had given up praying.

Daniel's enemies being on the watch to catch him, soon informed the king that he had broken the law; and, as the king himself could not reverse the sentence, he with great regret and anxiety was obliged to deliver Daniel up to the lions. Now he saw that he was entrapped by the other princes, and that it was their design to ruin Daniel. However, he spoke to the prophet in the kindest manner, so as to prove that he did not in his heart blame him for worshipping his God, and he told him, "Thy God, whom thou servest continually, he will deliver thee."

The sentence having been executed, Darius went to his palace and fasted all night, and refused to hear any of his bands play their music, and was so restless that he could get no sleep.

Early in the morning, he arose and went to the den, and asked Daniel if his God had preserved him; when, finding him quite safe among the wild beasts, he gladly ordered him to be released, the law having had its course, though Daniel was not killed. Then, as a punishment for those who had plotted to take away the innocent life of one of his most trusty servants, he ordered his accusers to be brought and to be cast into the den, "and their children and their wives" were cast in with them—for very likely they had also been busy in the plot; if they had not, this command of Darius was very cruel and unjust. They had not Daniel's God to protect them, for they had never sought his favour and





protection: and so, before they had even got properly into the den, the hungry animals seized them, and tore them to pieces.



Daniel now prospered more than ever; and Darius published a decree, commanding all his subjects to honour Daniel's God.

Daniel was privileged with some extraordinary visions, showing what was to happen in Persia after Cyrus, and various other important events which should take place among the great nations of the world.

But prior to this, having read in Jeremiah that God would restore his people after seventy years' captivity, he prayed most earnestly and charmingly, for the happiness of his nation in the coming restoration. His prayer is in the ninth chapter of his prophecy.

God was so pleased with his pious servant, that he sent the





DANIEL INTERPRETING THE WRITING



DESOLATION OF BABYLON



angel Gabriel to show him yet more interesting events which should happen, even the death and sacrifice of the Messiah, or Jesus Christ, which should take place after seventy prophetic weeks. The language of prophecy being secret, a year was called a day, and seven years a week. Seventy of these weeks made seventy times seven years. This number of years, by the rule of multiplication, make four hundred and ninety. At the end of that time the Messiah was cut off; or, in other words, the anointed Christ, our Lord Jesus, died for the sins of his people, as Daniel had foretold.

THE TWELVE MINOR PROPHETS.

1. HOSEA prophesied about eight hundred years before Christ. He executed his office sixty years. He foretold the captivity and dispersion of the kingdom of Israel, the present state of the Jews, and other important events. His prophecies were bold and terrible against transgressors.

2. JOEL prophesied against the sins of Judah, and foretold the Chaldean invasion, the total destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans, and the glorious state of the Christian Church in the end of the world. Indeed, the latter was foreseen by most of the prophets who gave witness to Jesus Christ.

3. AMOS was a herdsman. From this situation God called him to be a prophet. He pronounced the divine judgment against the Syrians, Tyrians, Edomites, Ammonites, and Moabites, all of which came to pass.

4. OBADIAH is the shortest of all the books of the Old Testament, containing only twenty-one verses. The main subject of this prophecy, is the punishment of the Edomites for their bad conduct towards the Jews; and, like the other prophecies, it contains some gracious promises to the people of God. The fulfil





ment of Obadiah's prophecy would afford us amusement as well as instruction ; but my plan will not admit of any more enlargement, lest I should make my work tedious.

5. JONAH.—Some consider Jonah as the most ancient of the prophets. His history is very interesting. He tells us that God commanded him to go to Nineveh and preach to the inhabitants of that city, which was the capital of the Assyrian empire ; that, instead of going there, he so disliked to deliver his message, that he took a ship and sailed far away for another place, which was a sad piece of folly, and he suffered, as all will more or less, for his disobedience to God. On his way to Tarshish, a tempest sprung up, and the mariners threw everything overboard to save their lives. Still the ship was in danger, and Jonah all this time was fast asleep, when they summoned him to awake. They then thought that they would cast lots, and see if they would point out any one in the ship who had displeased God. This thought was doubtless directed by God himself, that Jonah might be detected





and punished. "The lot fell upon Jonah." Jonah then told who he was, and confessed what he had done: that he had run away from delivering God's message. The mariners were shocked, and they asked what they should do to him. He felt humbled for his sin; and not wishing that they should perish with him, he desired them to cast him into the sea, and the sea would then be calm. These men, seeing that the God of Israel was the true God, then prayed God to forgive them for throwing Jonah overboard, for it was not their wish to commit murder. Then they cast Jonah into the sea, and it "ceased raging," and they, with becoming gratitude, offered up sacrifice to God. Let us, like them, never forget the goodness of God in preserving us from extreme dangers.

Jonah having been thrown overboard did not perish, for we are told that "the Lord had prepared a great fish to swallow" him up, and he remained in his belly three days and three nights. This fish is, in our New Testament, called a whale; but it might there also be called in the English 'a great fish:' for you must remember, that the Old Testament, was written in Hebrew, and the New in Greek, and that the English is only a translation. I mention this, first, to show you why, in the Old Testament, it is called by one name, and in the New Testament by another—because, those who turned each into English, made this difference, but the meaning is the same in both the original Scriptures. And, further, I mention this, because some have objected that a whale's throat was not wide enough to swallow a man, and therefore a whale could not have swallowed Jonah; to whom it may be replied, but "a great fish" could have done it, and this is what the Scripture says swallowed Jonah up. Now, there are, most likely, many great fish in the wide sea which have not yet been discovered among its many millions of inhabitants; even if we did not know of any which could swallow up a man. It is well known, however, that some kinds of sharks, which are a very greedy fish, have throats capacious enough to swallow a large man, and that even whole men have been found in these sharks' bellies. But it is admitted that the names of creatures are rather perplexing in the Hebrew, from which I have told you the Old Testament is ren-





dered into English, and some have supposed that no sort of fish is meant, but only a boat called by a like name with a great fish, and that Providence caused this boat to drift past the ship just as Jonah was thrown out, and so he remained preserved in it, tossed about in the midst of the great ocean three days and three nights, till the waves threw the boat on shore. You may hear of this, and so I mention it. The truth of the story, however, remains, which amounts to this,—that Jonah having been disobedient to God, God punished him for his disobedience; and yet he wonderfully preserved him when there appeared to be no hope but that he must perish. And, as for the great fish swallowing him up, we know that God, who made the fish, could make it do as he pleased; and that God who made the prophet could as well preserve him in the fish as create him; and could as well restore him from the fish, as he can raise up the dead body from the grave.

Jonah was now commanded a second time, to go to the great city of Nineveh, and preach what God told him. So Jonah went; and he cried, as he passed along in the city, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!"

When the people heard Jonah they believed he was a messenger from God; and they repented, and fasted, and turned from their wicked ways, and God spared them. O, how rich is God in mercy! It is thus he will spare and have mercy upon all those who sincerely repent, and unfeignedly believe his holy gospel. He is not willing that any should perish. Sinners always perish by their own obstinacy; but as they deserve to perish, they can only be saved by God's mercy and grace, who, when they repent, is ready to pardon them.

Jonah, instead of being delighted that the people believed his message, and that the city was spared, was mortified that his prophecy had not come to pass; but God never intended it should, if the people repented. All the dreadful threatenings in his word imply a want of repentance in sinners, before they will be executed.

How much more tender-hearted is God than man! Even this prophet could have borne to see a whole city perish, rather than his prophecy should fail. Surely, he ought rather to have been



glad that God had made him the means of bringing these sinners to repentance. So Jonah said to God, he knew how very merciful he was, and, as he supposed he would not destroy the whole city, he did not like to deliver his message; that was the reason why he had run away; and now, what he apprehended would be the case, had really come to pass. Indeed, the prophet was so vexed that he asked God to let him die. But God was also merciful to the prophet, and did not grant his rash request. On the contrary, he condescended to reason with his mind, and inquired of him, "Doest thou well to be angry?"

Jonah, however, still seemed to think that something might happen to the city; so he went out of it, and made a booth on a spot where he could see Nineveh. A booth differed from a tent, being made, not of cloth, but only of branches of trees, something like our harbours in our gardens. In this situation, God was also still kind to him, and he caused a gourd to spring up and cover Jonah's booth; so that he was well protected in the day from the burning sun, and at night from the cold. Jonah was pleased at this comfort; but in the morning God caused a worm to destroy his gourd, and a strong warm wind drove the heat of the scorching sun full in Jonah's face, so that he became quite faint; and he said, "It is better for me to die than to live." Then God blamed Jonah for feeling so much at the loss of his gourd, and yet he could not feel pained at the thoughts of Nineveh perishing, where there were not merely immense numbers of grown-up persons, but a hundred and twenty thousand little infants, who could not possibly tell their right hand from their left, and who must have perished with their wicked parents.

6. **MICAH** was a prophet of Judah. He confirmed the predictions of Isaiah against the people of Israel and Judah.

7. **NAHUM** denounced the judgments of God against Nineveh, which returned to its wickedness after the preaching of Jonah. Here I shall tell you a little more about Nineveh. This city, the capital of Assyria, stood on the banks of the river Tigris. It was very large, and contained, at least, six hundred thousand inhabi





tants. Ancient writers tell us, that its walls were a hundred feet high, sixty miles round, more than twice the size of New York—and that it was defended by no less than fifteen hundred towers, from which the Assyrian warriors could command and drive off any enemies who should attempt to mount their walls. This famous city, notwithstanding its strength, was taken at several different times, and was entirely ruined in the time of Adrian, a Roman Emperor. It was afterwards rebuilt by the Persians; but the new city was destroyed by the Saracens twelve or thirteen hundred years ago. No vestige of the ancient city now remains. So Nahum prophesied, and the word of the Lord has strictly been fulfilled. This prophet said, “The Lord will make an utter end of the place thereof—she is empty, void, and waste.” The fate of Nineveh, at last, should teach sinners not to trifle with God. He is merciful, but he is also just. The sinner who truly repents shall, without doubt, be saved, but he who returns to his wickedness and hardens himself, shall perish.

8. HABAKKUK was one of the prophets employed to foretell the destruction of Jerusalem by the Chaldeans.

9. ZEPHANIAH prophesied, not only against the wicked Jews, but also against the Philistines, Moabites, Ammonites, and Ethiopians.

10. HAGGAI, by his prophecies, encouraged the rebuilding of the temple after the Jews had been restored by Cyrus, and the decree in their favour was renewed by Darius, as you read in Ezra and Nehemiah.

11. ZECHARIAH'S prophecies also encouraged the Jews in the rebuilding of the temple. He has some remarkable prophecies respecting some minute particulars in the life of Jesus Christ, as his riding on a colt, the foal of an ass, and the price paid to Judas to betray him.

12. MALACHI was the last of the prophets of the Old Testament. He was known as a prophet about a hundred and twenty



years after the Jews returned from Babylon, and four hundred and twenty years before Christ. He prophesied of Christ, and of his herald John the Baptist, who should have the spirit and courage of Elijah; representing Christ as a glorious sun, who should arise and shine upon the nations darkened by ignorance, with health in his beams.

There is a small volume called the Apocrypha, meaning "hid from," because its contents were not published for reading generally, like the Holy Scriptures. This book is sometimes bound up with the Bible, because it relates some things which happened between the time of Malachi and the coming of Christ. However, though it contains many interesting and even good things, it has no divine mark upon it. It exhibits no divinely prophetic character to foretell the state of the church and of the world, and to lead to Jesus Christ, who was to come into the world to save sinners; and it is not quoted, in any of its parts, by Christ or his apostles.

With Malachi, the gift of prophecy under the old dispensation ceased, for John the Baptist was rather the immediate forerunner, than the prophetic preacher of Jesus. Four hundred years of history, from the time of Malachi to the coming of the Saviour into the world, must therefore be filled up from what is called ancient or profane history—called profane, not because it is wicked, but because it has no pretensions to be sacred like the Bible.

Thus, by the good providence of God, I have brought my Commentary on the Old Testament to a close. I shall be happy if my labours have been the means of affording you amusement and instruction; but much more so, if they have led you to love the holy word of God, and to trust in that blessed and divine Saviour to whom I have often referred as shadowed forth in the sacrifices of the ceremonial law, and foretold by the prophets; and on whose most interesting life, death, and sufferings, we hope more particularly to dwell in some future thoughts on the NEW TESTAMENT.

THE END OF THE OLD TESTAMENT.





THE HISTORY OF THE JEWS,

BETWEEN

THE TIMES RECORDED IN THE OLD AND NEW TESTAMENT.

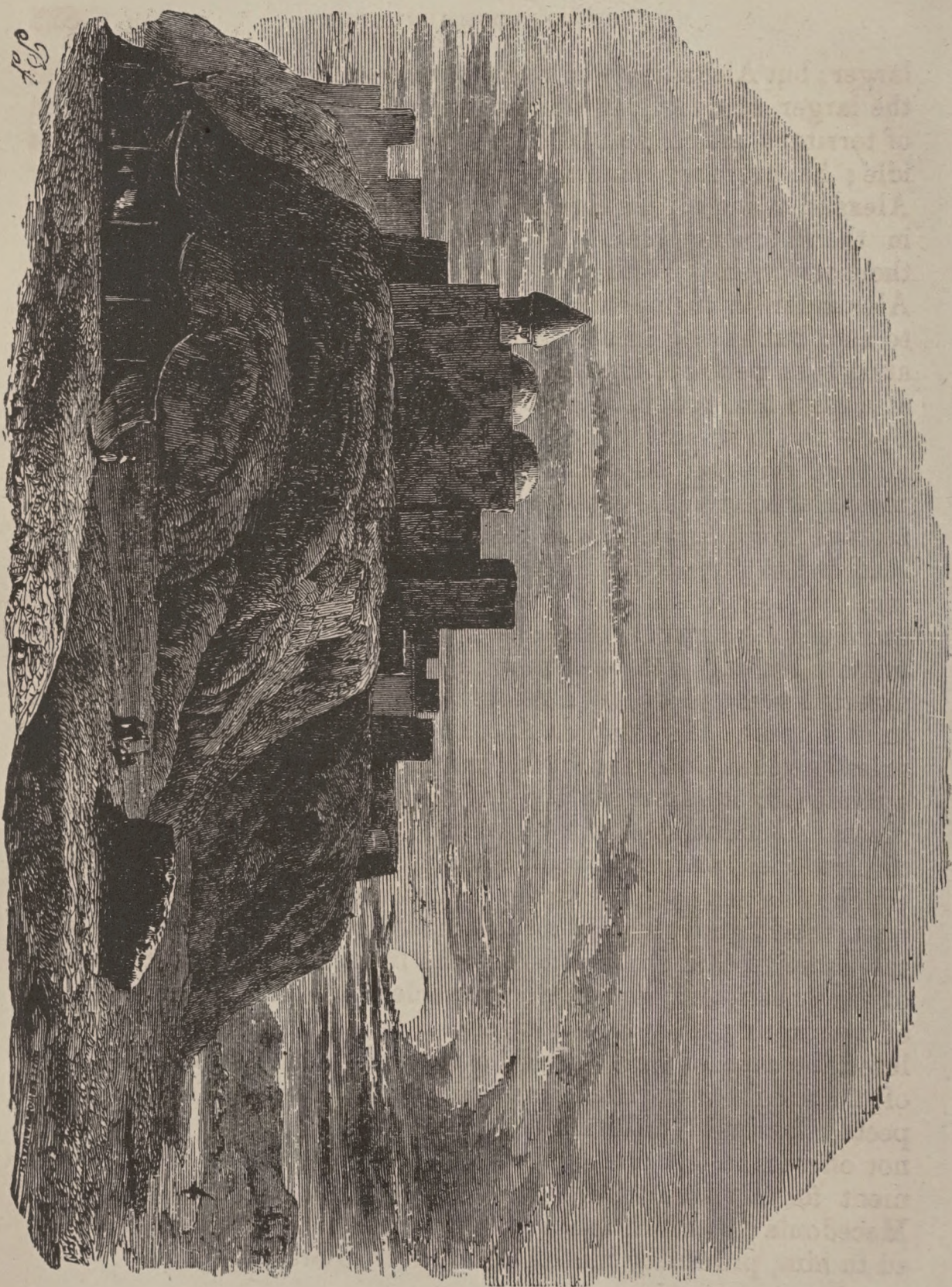
THE Old Testament brings down the History of the Jews to the days of the prophet Malachi, and of Nehemiah, who was the last governor of that people sent from the court of Persia to Judea. The Persian Empire, you will recollect, succeeded the Babylonian Empire, and the king obtained the country of the Jews, who paid to the conquerors a yearly tribute. It is not certain how long Nehemiah lived, after he had reformed the affairs of the Jews. After his decease, the office of governor of the Jews appears to have been executed by the High Priest, under a Persian governor of all Syria.

There were several High Priests in succession, from the time of Nehemiah, of whom it is not particularly necessary to make mention, but the time of the High Priest Jaddua is too important to pass it over in silence. Philip, king of Macedon, was at this period succeeded by his son, Alexander the Great, who had only just attained the twentieth year of his age. This prince took the command of an army of Grecians to act against Persia, and crossing the Hellespont—a strait, or narrow part of the sea, between Europe and Asia—he passed into the latter country. This was about three hundred and thirty-four years before Christ. Alexander had with him thirty thousand foot soldiers, and five thousand horsemen. Darius met him in a few days, with an army five times



JONAH CAST FORTH.





TOMB OF JONAH.

larger; but Alexander was a very skilful general, and he put to flight the larger army of his adversary, and overran a great portion of territory called Asia-Minor. During this time, Darius was not idle; he prepared an army which threatened totally to destroy Alexander and all his forces. With this he marched to meet him in the following year. It consisted of no less than six hundred thousand men. With such a force, Darius should have engaged Alexander in the open plains, so that his men might have room to act; but having incautiously engaged them in a part where his army was pent up, in such a way that he could only bring a few at a time into action, he was again totally defeated by the Greeks. Syria was now soon reduced to subjection under Alexander, and he then directed his course towards Judea. His approach was most alarming to the Jews, who had shown themselves particularly zealous in aiding those who resisted him. On this account he was resolved to punish them severely. Jaddua, the High Priest, hearing of his approach, called upon the people to unite with him in sacrifices and prayer, that God would avert the threatening calamity. Having humbled themselves before the Lord, they were directed what to do, by a remarkable dream of the High Priest. In this dream, God told Jaddua to go and meet Alexander in his priestly robes, followed by all the priests in their proper dresses, attended by a numerous body of the people, dressed in white garments. Jaddua, therefore, ordered the gates of the city to be thrown open, and marched in solemn procession to an eminence which was near it. Alexander approached, and gazed with awe upon the High Priest in his splendid array, and his mitre with the name of God emblazoned on the front, the pure white dresses of the priests, and the solemn spectacle of the people; and, instead of attempting to execute vengeance, he hastened forward and saluted the man of God with religious veneration. Parmenio, one of the king's favourites, ventured to ask the reason of this unexpected homage. Alexander is said to have replied that it was not offered to the priest, but to his God, in grateful acknowledgment for a vision with which he had been favoured at Dio in Macedonia; in which this very person, in this very habit, appeared to him, promising him the Empire of Persia.





Having kindly embraced the High Priest, Alexander entered Jerusalem with him, and proceeded to the temple, where he offered up sacrifices to God. He was afterwards much delighted when Jaddua showed him the prophecy of Daniel, and pointed out the place in which the prophet foretold that the Persian Empire should be overthrown by a Grecian king. Alexander now felt confident of success, and fully persuaded that he was the person alluded to in the prophecies.

Before his departure from Jerusalem, Alexander, at the request of Jaddua, granted the Jews the free exercise of their religion, and other valuable privileges.

Soon after his visit to Jerusalem, Alexander conquered Egypt, and built the city of Alexandria, where multitudes of the Jews went and settled.

Darius once more raised an overwhelming army, amounting to one million one hundred thousand men! The brave and more experienced troops of Alexander now again conquered, and, with the battle, the Persian Empire fell under the dominion of Greece. Yet the skill and bravery of Alexander and his troops had been nothing, if God had not, in his wisdom, determined to punish this mighty empire for its sins, and to bring it to an end; for while wicked men contend at their pleasure with each other, it is under the direction and control of his providence that kingdoms rise and fall, flourish and decay.

Darius survived the battle, but was forced to fly for his life, when he was treacherously killed by one of his officers named Bessus.

Alexander did not long enjoy his conquests. He died, aged only thirty-two. All his family were murdered, and four of his generals shared the vast dominions of their royal master. One of the divided kingdoms was Egypt. This fell to the lot of Ptolemy Lagus, who invaded Judea, and led a hundred thousand of its people captives into his country; but as he treated them kindly, many were glad to follow their brethren, their own land having been brought into a very miserable condition, on account of the ruinous wars with which it had been troubled.

Two hundred and ninety-two years before Christ, died Simon,





called the Just, a distinguished High Priest of the Jews. Simon the Just is said to have carefully perused the manuscript books of the Old Testament; and to have completed what is called the sacred Canon, by adding the Books of Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, and Malachi.

In the reign of Ptolemy Philadelphus, and about two hundred and eighty-four years before Christ, the Jews in Egypt, having forgotten the Hebrew language, obtained the privilege of having the sacred Scriptures translated from the Hebrew into the Greek for their use, and a copy of them was placed in the royal library. This Greek translation obtained the name of the *Septuagint*, a Greek word, which was to intimate that it was translated by seventy learned men employed for the purpose, though this number is not considered to be quite correct. By the circulation of the Greek translation, the word of God was laid open to vast numbers, who would never otherwise have enjoyed its perusal. And here it may be observed that this Greek translation was used by Christ and his apostles; which accounts for some differences of expression, which you will sometimes find between the same text in the Old Testament, and in the New. Different languages will not always admit of the same precise expression, and then, in turning one language into another, it is sometimes necessary to use another expression, which if it cannot be the same, is as near as possible to that of the original language. Thus, in turning the Hebrew into the Greek, some such changes must have occurred; but none of them materially alter the sense of that which was first written, or are contradictions to it. And here we may see the wisdom of God in permitting the conquests of Alexander. The Greek empire thus becoming very extensive, that language was very generally spoken; and, in consequence, the Greek copy of the Scriptures might be as extensively read, not only by Jews but by heathens; and when the apostles afterwards began to preach the gospel, they could appeal to a book well-known, and open to all, to prove from its contents that Christ was the true Messiah—the divine person about whom the prophets foretold, that he was come into the world to die for sinners.

The Jews now suffered much, with the neighbouring nations,





owing to the continued wars which were kept up by Alexander's successors. Antiochus, king of Syria, made war with Ptolemy Philopater, king of Egypt, about two hundred and eighteen years before Christ, and defeated the Egyptian forces. Ptolemy having regained the provinces which had been taken from Egypt, made a progress through them; and, coming to Jerusalem, he offered a great number of victims, and made some valuable presents to the temple. But having been hindered from entering the holy of holies, or most holy place of all in the temple, by Simon, the High Priest at that time, he departed to Egypt full of rage against the Jews. On reaching that country, he instantly deprived the Jews of their privileges; and,—not considering that punishment sufficient,—the cruel prince assembled multitudes of them together at Alexandria, that he might have them thrown among wild beasts to be devoured; but ancient writings record, that the furious animals, instead of hurting the Jews, turned upon their persecutors. The son of Ptolemy Philopater, called Ptolemy Epiphanes, succeeded his father, about two hundred and four years before Christ. Ptolemy Epiphanes, as he was called, was now but an infant; and thinking that the poor child could not help himself, Antiochus united with Philip, king of Macedon, and agreed with him to seize upon, and go share in, the Egyptian dominion. They succeeded in their object, so far as to conquer a large portion, including Palestine. The Jews willingly submitted to Antiochus, and rendered him such essential services, that he gave orders that their city should be repaired, and that those who had been dispersed should remain and inhabit it; and, among other important favours, he conferred on them the privileges which had been granted by Alexander the Great.

The Antiochus of whom we have just read having died, was succeeded by his son Seleucus Philopater, who, having reigned eleven years, was also succeeded by his brother Antiochus, generally called Epiphanes, which signifies *the illustrious*, though by some more properly called *Epimanes*, or the madman. As his father, being subdued in part by the Romans, had left his dominions subject to a tribute to the Roman power, this Antiochus found it difficult to pay it; and, among other schemes to raise





money, he profanely sold the office of High Priest to those who were profane enough to buy it. He first deposed the good and pious High Priest Onias, and sold the pontificate, or High Priest's sacred office, to his brother Jason, for a large sum to be paid yearly; and then he deposed Jason, and sold it to his brother Menelaus for almost double the sum to be paid yearly.

About this time Antiochus made war upon Egypt, and conquered the whole kingdom. While he was in that country, a report was spread in Judea that he was dead, and Jason marched with a thousand men to recover the priesthood which he had basely bought; and of which, on his brother becoming a better purchaser, he had been deprived. He succeeded in surprising the city of Jerusalem, drove Menelaus into the castle, and cruelly put to the sword, and to all other kinds of death, all those whom he considered to be his adversaries. Antiochus being informed of these events, hastened out of Egypt to quell the rebellion; and being told that the inhabitants of Jerusalem had made great rejoicing at the news of his death, he was so provoked that, having stormed the city, he slew forty thousand persons, sold as many more for slaves, plundered the temple of gold and furniture, entered the holy of holies, and sacrificed a sow—a most unclean animal, forbidden in the sacrifices—on the altar of burnt-offering, and caused the broth of it to be sprinkled all over the temple. He then returned to Antioch, laden with the spoils both of Egypt and Judea, appointing one Philip, a most cruel man, to be governor of Judea, and continuing Menelaus, a wicked wretch, in the High Priesthood.

Not long after, when he would have retained his power in Egypt, but was prevented by the Romans, he was so enraged at the disappointment, that, out of mere madness, he detached twenty thousand warriors from his army, with orders to destroy Jerusalem, to put all the men to the sword, and to make slaves of the women and children. These orders were executed on a sabbath-day, when all the people were assembled at public worship, so that none escaped but such as could hide themselves in caves, or reach the mountains by flight. After having despoiled the city of all its riches, they set it on fire in several places, demolished the





houses, and pulled down the walls round about it, and then, with the ruins, they built a strong fortress on an eminence that overlooked the temple, whence the garrison might sally forth and murder those that dared to worship there.

On his arrival at Antioch, Antiochus published a decree, requiring all people in his dominions to be conformed to the religion of the Greeks; and he sent one Athenæus, a Grecian idolater, to teach the Jews their idolatrous rites, and threatened with the most cruel deaths any who dared refuse. When this idolater arrived at Jerusalem, he obtained help from some apostate Jews, and caused all sacrifices to the God of Israel to cease; he suppressed all the observances of the Jewish religion; polluted the temple, and made it unfit for the worship of God; profaned the sabbaths and festivals; forbade the children to be circumcised; burned every copy of the law which could be found; dedicated the temple to one of the heathen deities called Jupiter Olympius; erected a statue of the false god, on the altar of burnt-offerings; and, put every one to death who despised the king's decree.

A venerable priest named Mattathias, with his five sons, having retired to his native city, called Modin, there made a noble stand against the persecutor. Apelles, an officer of the king, in vain endeavoured to compel them to bow down to idols. He even offered great rewards to Mattathias if he would comply. The aged priest not only rejected the bribes, but slew the first apostate Jew who was proceeding to deny his God. He also rose upon the king's agent, and, aided by his sons, put him to death, with all his attendants; demolished the idols and their altars; and then withdrew to the mountains. Being joined by a number of his faithful countrymen, they formed a valiant army; and, marching through Judea, they broke down the heathen altars in all the cities; restored circumcision; cut off the ministers of the idols, and all the apostate Jews; and revived the worship of the one living and true God. This took place one hundred and sixty-seven years before Christ.

Mattathias died during the next year, and appointed Judas, one of his sons, surnamed Maccabeus, to succeed him in the command of the army. The army increased with zealous Jews, and this





brave man defeated several large armies of Antiochus, under his bravest commanders. He also recovered Jerusalem, purified the temple, restored the appointed worship of God, and repaired the almost ruined city. Antiochus was so enraged that he threatened to extirpate the Jews; but before he could attempt to put his threat into execution, God Almighty cut him off with a most dreadful disease. Antiochus Cupator succeeded his father. He was very young, and governed by an officer named Lysias. Under his guidance he aimed to fulfil the wish of his father, and tried to league other nations against the Jews; but Judas prevented the success of this scheme by attacking them before they were able to unite; and he beat the Idumeans, Syrians, Arabs, and others, and remained their scourge till he fell in battle, about three years after the death of Antiochus Epiphanes. He was succeeded by his brother Jonathan, who, with Simon, his brother, managed the affairs of their nation with great prudence and courage.

Jonathan now took upon him the office of High Priest at Jerusalem, uniting with it the honour of civil governor, and formed an alliance with the Romans. Being slain by treachery, Simon, his brother, was chosen to succeed him, and after a reformation at Jerusalem, he made the Jews strong enough to become their own defenders. He, with two of his sons, was treacherously murdered by his son-in-law.

John Hyrcanus succeeded his father Simon, about one hundred and thirty-four years before Christ. He was succeeded by his son, Aristobulus. This prince raised Judea again to a monarchy, and was the first, after the captivity, who took the title of KING. Aristobulus was succeeded by his son Alexander Janneus.

After the death of Alexander his widow reigned nine years. On her death, Hyrcanus her son reigned three months, when his brother Aristobulus dethroned him. Aretas, king of Arabia, took up arms for Hyrcanus, when Aristobulus procured help on his side from the Romans. Pompey, the Roman general, however, decided for the elder brother, Hyrcanus, and, taking Jerusalem, seated him in the government: but he would not allow him to wear the royal diadem, and made Judea tributary to the Romans. This was in the year before Christ sixty-three. Pompey, with several





of his officers, impiously entered into the holy of holies ; and Crassus, governor of Syria, pillaged the temple of ten thousand talents of silver.

Soon after, Antipater, a nobleman of Idumea, was made governor of Judea, being appointed by the celebrated Roman, Julius Cæsar. Hyrcanus now retained only the office of High Priest. Antipater was succeeded by his son, Herod the Great, who reigned at the time that Christ was born. This wicked prince restored the temple to great splendour. Not long after the death of Herod, Judea became a Roman province. The sceptre departed from Judah, for Shiloh, a name given to the Saviour, in a prophecy spoken by Jacob, was now come ; and after him the Jews were to be dispersed, which took place when Jerusalem was totally destroyed by Titus, the Roman, and son of Vespasian, in the year of our Lord seventy-nine. The Jews have been ever since scattered abroad, among almost all the nations in the world, having filled up the measure of their iniquities by crucifying the Son of God at Jerusalem. But God has promised to restore them ; and they shall at last take Jesus for their Saviour, and Jews and Gentiles—that is, we and all the other nations who were and are heathens—shall praise and love him throughout all the earth. Amen.



SYMBOL OF THE NEW DISPENSATION





ANGELS APPEARING TO THE SHEPHERDS



THE
GOSPEL ACCORDING TO ST. MATTHEW ;

OR,

MATTHEW'S GLAD TIDINGS ABOUT JESUS CHRIST.

THE FIRST AND SECOND CHAPTERS OF ST. MATTHEW.

The Birth and Infancy of Jesus Christ.

“And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name Jesus: for he shall save his people from their sins.”—
Chap. i. 21.

As we are now entering upon a new part of the Holy Scriptures,
it may be desirable to explain to you the difference between that





which we have gone through, and that which we are about to notice. That which we have gone through, is called **THE OLD TESTAMENT**, and that which we are about to notice, is called **THE NEW TESTAMENT**. Testament is a word which properly means *covenant* or *agreement*. From Genesis to Malachi, we have the book first given to the Jews, and which contains all the *agreements* and promises made with and to them, by their kind and gracious God. But when Jesus Christ came into the world, he declared the mercy of God, not to the Jews only, but also to the Gentiles, or all the other nations which were then Heathen. This declaration is called *The New Covenant*, because the former is now no longer in existence, for that confined God's favours to the Jewish Church, but this opens them freely to people of all nations on the face of the earth. Some call this second volume of the Sacred Scriptures, *a will*, for **by** that name we sometimes express *a testament*. When understood as a will, it means something left by a friend, to be given us after his death. So, by the death of Jesus Christ, pardon, and peace, and heaven are bestowed upon all who believe in him; and for the purpose of giving us the news of this gift the New Testament is published.

All the terms of the old covenant are now done away. Circumcision—or an incision, or cut on the flesh, as the mark of an Israelite—and the sacrifices, and various ceremonies peculiar to the Jews, were the evidences of agreeing on their part to the terms of God's promises, but now whosoever believes in Jesus Christ shall not perish, but have everlasting life; for in him all the law has been fulfilled, and he, by one offering of himself, has removed the guilt of sin from all that trust in him for salvation. Let us then joyfully read the History of this New Covenant, which concerns both you and me; and may we truly believe in Jesus and be saved!

The book which begins The New Testament is called "The Gospel according to St. Matthew."

"Gospel" is a word which signifies *glad tidings*, or *good news*; and this book is so called, because it tells us about Jesus Christ coming into the world to save sinners. By *Gospel* we also mean *God's Word*.





Matthew, whose surname was Levi, was a native of Galilee, a part which Christ visited. He was a Jew, and was employed by the Romans as a tax-gatherer among his people, who in the days of Christ, paid tribute or taxes to the Romans, a powerful nation that ruled over them, and over many other parts of the world. The taxes which he collected were what we should call Custom-house duties, or certain sums of money on things brought into Judea from other parts, and things sent out of the country. His station was at Capernaum, on the Sea of Galilee, and there too he received tax-money from all persons that went by water. He was "sitting at the receipt of custom" taking money, when Christ called him to leave his affairs and follow him; that he might bear witness to what he should hear him say, and what he should see him do. Hence he became one of the twelve Apostles, and the messenger of Christ to mankind, and the first writer of his history.

This Gospel was written for the use of the Hebrews. The writer's design was to strengthen the faith of those that trusted for salvation in Jesus Christ, and to make those believe who knew nothing of Jesus, by declaring all the great things which he knew about him: having himself seen and heard enough to establish his own belief in him, as the holy Saviour and Redeemer, who was foretold by the prophets, and who had at last "visited and redeemed his people."

Saint means *holy*; all the good men who wrote the Scriptures might have borne the same name, for they were "holy men of God," who were taught from heaven what they should write. In our New Testament, however, this is a distinction given to the four Evangelists, as they are called—that is, messengers of glad tidings, who have given an account of the birth, life, miracles, doctrines, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ, and to the apostles, who wrote the other portions of it.

The first chapter of this Gospel gives us an account of "the generation" of Jesus Christ,—that is, it tells us from whom he descended. And this was very important; for none of the Jews would ever





have believed in him, if they had not been sure that he was the same MESSIAH of whom the prophets often spoke. I must here tell you that Messiah means *anointed*. The prophets, priests, and kings of Israel were anointed with oil; that is, oil was poured upon them, to signify that God would so pour his holy blessings upon them; and it showed that they were set apart for their particular offices, to attend to those alone. The Messiah, as Jesus is called, more especially bore that name, which is in other words *the anointed*, or *the anointed one*. CHRIST is a name which has also the same meaning. None were ever anointed with such an abundance of gifts and of grace as he was. He was a Prophet, a Priest, and a King at the same time: *a prophet*, because he taught the way to heaven, beside foretelling many things which were to happen on earth;—*a priest*, because he offered up a sacrifice, and such a one as made all sacrifices of an inferior kind of no use in future, so that they ceased when he offered up himself;—and *a king*, because he was to reign over many hearts, and his subjects should yield him willing obedience in all times to come, and in all parts of the world.

Matthew traces the line of Jesus Christ from Abraham; for God promised to Abraham, in the twelfth chapter of Genesis, "In thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed." Now all the families of the earth could not be blessed in Abraham himself, for the blessing of God rested only on the Jews as a people, while Abraham lived; all the earth besides consisted of the worshippers of idols, whom God abhorred, instead of blessing them. It was, therefore, understood by the Jews, that one should spring from him, who should indeed bless all the world,—not the Jews only, but the nations of the Gentiles. Matthew, then, in showing that Christ was the Messiah expected, here proves, in the first place, that he had one mark of the Messiah, for he sprung from Abraham.

But this was not enough: Abraham's family branched off in different lines, Isaac's in one branch and Ishmael's in another; and so with the families that followed. But there was one particular line in which the promise was made, and among those of that line from Abraham was David; God had promised him, as we are told





in the seventh chapter of the Second Book of Samuel, that he would set up his seed—or one of his race, after him, and “establish the throne of his kingdom forever.” Well, then, Matthew proves that Christ sprang also from David, as well as from Abraham; and, therefore, so far he showed that he was of a race from which the Messiah was to come.

Now, you must see that there is nothing unmeaning in the long train of hard Hebrew names which you find in this chapter, beginning with “Abraham begat Isaac, and Isaac begat Jacob; and Jacob begat Judas and his brethren.” For had not Matthew been so particular, he could not have proved that Christ came from Abraham and David, from whom the Messiah, who was to redeem his people, was to come. And thus he traces the whole pedigree,—as we call it,—from father to son, from generation to generation, till he comes to Jacob, who begat, or was the father of, “Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ;” and so, on the reputed father’s side, Christ was descended from David and Abraham.

The first proof that our Lord was the Messiah, the anointed Saviour, was his genealogy; that he descended from David and Abraham, as the Messiah was to spring from them.

The next proof was that, as the prophet Isaiah had foretold, Isa. vii. 14, he was born of a *virgin*, or of one that was unmarried; for though Joseph was the husband of Mary, he was only her betrothed husband, that is, he was only *engaged* to her, as we say;—but that engagement, according to the custom of the Jews, could not be broken, and so he was to all intents and purposes by law and right, the husband of Mary, though she was a virgin, or as yet not in reality married. Now, Jesus Christ was “conceived” or formed “by the Holy Ghost,” or the Holy Spirit. We read in scripture of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, or Spirit, all of which names mean GOD, and only ONE God, yet *three existences* in this one God. I cannot explain this any better to you, for I can hardly explain my ownself, and I am sure then, I cannot attempt to explain about God Almighty’s existence, for “God is a SPIRIT,” and has no form like me, and “no man hath seen God at any time” to tell us more about him. It was the Holy Ghost





who formed the body of the blessed Son, who was born of the Virgin Mary; and St. Matthew tells us, "Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel, which, being interpreted, is, God with us." "God with us," means again—God in flesh, God in our nature. The divine Saviour most wonderfully dwelt in the form of a man, as we dwell in our habitations, or as our spirits dwell in us.

It was revealed to Joseph, in a dream, that this child was the Messiah; and after Jesus was born, Joseph went to live with Mary.

There was a third sign that Jesus was the Messiah—the anointed and expected Saviour, and this St. Matthew also takes care to tell us. He was "born in Bethlehem of Judea." There were two places called Bethlehem, and the place where Christ was born was called Bethlehem of Judea, to distinguish it from another Bethlehem in the tribe of Zabulon, which is mentioned in Joshua xix. 15.

That every thing might clearly point out Jesus when he should come into the world, the place where he should be born was also mentioned in prophecy: "for thus it is written by the prophets; and thou Bethlehem in the land of Judah art not the least among the princes of Judah: for out of thee shall come a governor that shall rule my people Israel." This prophecy is in the fifth chapter of Micah, where the place is called Bethlehem Ephratah, but it was the same place, and in the land of Judah. This town is said not to be the least among the princes of Judah; for the tribes of Israel were divided into thousands, and every thousand was under a ruler or prince: and so, though Bethlehem was not the most distinguished of all places, yet it should have the highest honours conferred upon it, for there the Messiah should be born, and there he was born.

At the time when Christ was born, "there came wise men from the East to Jerusalem," to inquire about him. These wise men are so called either because they were thought by the idolaters where they lived to know a great deal more than other people, as they had the art of conjuring, and pretended to know future





things; or else they might be a set of men called Philosophers, who were great inquirers after wisdom. The place from which these wise men came is supposed to have been Persia, because that lay east of Judea. Here they saw a wonderful star shining in the heavens, and it appeared to them to be exactly over the land of Judea. They, therefore, thought that something extraordinary had happened there; and it is supposed that they now remembered a prophecy of Balaam, who lived in the East—which prophecy might have been handed down to them—who, although he was a wicked man, was obliged to speak the truth when God put it into his mouth. This prophecy is in the twenty-fourth chapter of Numbers, "There shall come a star out of Jacob, and a sceptre shall rise out of Israel;" from which they might conclude that this singular star was the star mentioned, and that it would guide them to the wonderful ruler who was to hold the sceptre, or sign of dominion in Israel.

As soon as they arrived at Jerusalem they asked some of the principal persons, "where is he that is born king of the Jews?" for," said they "we have seen his star in the East, and are come to worship him." They supposed that the chief Jews must know all about it; and as they, perhaps, thought that this ruler would have an extensive empire, and that they might probably be among his subjects, they wished to be early in paying him their homage.

Herod the Great—as he was called—then reigned over the Jews; and when the wise men inquired after this new King, and the news came to the ears of Herod, he was "troubled, and all Jerusalem with him." Herod was troubled for fear that he should lose his crown; and all Jerusalem were troubled lest there should be a civil war about who should have it, Christ or Herod. Now Christ came not to be the king of the Jews, as Herod was, but to be a spiritual King,—to reign, not over territories, but over hearts; and to conquer, not the surrounding nations, but to overcome sin, death, and the powers of hell. But Herod and the Jewish people did not understand this: however, as they must have known something about the prophecies, he thought there was something serious in the question of the wise men, and that most likely the promised Messiah was come. And so wicked was he,





that if Christ had demanded his throne, he was determined not to give it up, even to the promised Messiah himself. And so mad was he, that he thought he could destroy him, and so make even the divine prophecy to be false.

He therefore very craftily set about, if possible, to destroy Jesus. And first he inquired of the chief priests and scribes where Christ was likely to be born; and they referred him to the prophecy of Micah, and told him—at Bethlehem of Judea. So Herod sent for the wise men, and informed them that he had found out the place after which they inquired, and he wished them to go and see the new King; and when they had found him they were to let him know, and he would go and worship him too. This was very artful; for, had they done as he wished, his design was, not to worship Jesus, but to go and kill him.

Having received Herod's commands, the wise men took their leave, and set off for Bethlehem, which was only six miles from Jerusalem. It was strange that Herod did not go too, as the distance was so short, and he might then easily have accomplished his wicked design; but he thought, from this circumstance, that the wise men would soon return, and it was not worth his while to take the trouble to find out the new Prince, as they could act as his servants and do it for him. Thus God allowed him to deceive himself, and he was deceived.

When the wise men departed, "lo, the star which they saw in the East went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was." And, "when they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding joy." The star then directed them to the house, where "they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him." Then, according to the custom in that part of the world, when great persons were approached, and especially kings, they "opened their treasures, and presented unto him gifts; gold and frankincense, and myrrh," the frankincense and myrrh both being valuable gums from Arabia, and other parts of the East.

The wise men having seen Jesus, and left this suitable supply to his parents, who, though descended from King David, were but poor, departed for their own homes. Their nearest way was





that which they took, and so they had no need to return to Jerusalem, as Herod desired them to do ; but the grand reason why they did not was because God warned them, in a dream, not to return to Herod—probably each of them dreaming the same thing, which was very striking ; and so they obeyed the warning, and went back to their own country.

God then spoke to Joseph by an angel in a dream, and ordered him to leave Bethlehem directly with the infant Jesus and his mother, and go into Egypt, which was not far from Judea, and was out of Herod's dominions, and there to remain till he should receive a like command to return, for Herod would seek to kill the child. So Joseph got up directly, and escaped by night into Egypt, where he, Mary, and the infant, remained till the death of Herod.

When Herod found that the wise men did not return, he was in a great rage ; and, supposing that Jesus was at Bethlehem, he was resolved yet to carry his wicked design against him into effect. He could not, indeed, learn which was the infant he wanted ; but, to make sure of his mark, he ordered some of his officers to go to Bethlehem, and kill all the children that were two years old and under, thinking that by killing the children of that age he should be sure to kill the new king. You may wonder how any king should be so cruel, or how any officers would obey him ; but in eastern countries kings generally do as they please, and officers must obey or lose their heads. The Pacha or chief of Egypt, only about sixty years ago, treacherously slew a people called the Mamelukes, whom he invited to his capital for the purpose of slaughtering them. The wicked king Herod was so cruel that history tells us he even slew three of his own sons ; no wonder then that he had a heart so hard as to kill the poor little infants in Bethlehem.

When Herod was dead, Joseph was again spoken to by an angel in a dream ; and, being ordered to return, he left Egypt and went to live at Nazareth.





THE THIRD CHAPTER OF ST. MATTHEW.

Account of John the Baptist, the Forerunner of Jesus Christ.

"In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judea."—Ver. 3.

Another testimony to Jesus being the Messiah is stated by St. Matthew. It is that the Messiah was to have a forerunner; or as great men used to have footmen or heralds going before them, to clear the way for them, so Jesus was to be announced to the world by a prophet. And "in those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judea."—This was "the voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord;" which the prophet Isaiah foretold in the fortieth chapter of his prophecy. Here then was another evidence; so that no mistake could happen about Jesus being the divine Saviour: and if any one had pretended to be so, it could easily have been proved that he was only a pretender, unless he had descended from David and Abraham—had been born of a virgin—had been born at Bethlehem of Judea—and had had a forerunner "crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord." See how necessary it was that St. Matthew should write all these facts, to confirm our faith in Jesus.

By a wilderness you are not here to understand a place entirely deserted, which is the meaning which we now often have when we speak of a wilderness; but this was a part of the country not so thickly peopled, nor so much inclosed into fields and vineyards, as other parts were. It was a hilly, broken country, in which, while there were some towns and villages, there was a general lack of water, and many forests of stunted trees, and caves, and thickets inhabited by wild beasts.

John the Baptist—the name by which he is distinguished from John the Evangelist—was a priest of the order of Aaron, though we do not find that he ever ministered in the temple; but we



JERUSALEM FROM THE MOUNT OF OLIVES.





THE OFFERINGS OF THE WISE MEN.



shall have occasion to notice more about him, as we proceed through the four Gospels.

The subject on which John the Baptist preached, was repentance; the theme of his discourses was—"Repent ye, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand." To repent is to change the mind, and to change it from evil to good, so as to change the dispositions of the soul and the conduct of the life. This John declared to the wicked Jews, who were now grown very bad, that they must do, if they would be prepared to receive that divine Saviour who was coming to reign among them, not as a temporal, but as a spiritual Prince; and this was what he meant by "the Kingdom of Heaven" being "at hand." And so he prepared the way of the Lord. And, my dear young reader, if your heart is ever prepared to receive Jesus Christ, you must repent of your sins, turn from them, being very angry with them, and very sorry for them—and then you will be ready to believe in him, and to trust your soul on him for salvation.

The dress of John the Baptist appears to have been singular enough; but it was the dress in which the prophets usually appeared—perhaps a camel's skin with the hair on it, or a garment of hair, which was very rough; for in such plain robes the prophets used to dress. John's meat was also as singular as his dress, for he lived chiefly on "locusts and wild honey."—Locusts were large flying insects, cooked for food by the poor in Palestine—though some suppose it was the locust-bean or *carob* that is meant here. The wild honey was that gathered by wild bees, in the hollow trunks of trees. This was the food of the poorest people, and by living on this he showed the people that he was the predicted forerunner of Christ.

It appears that John by his preaching attracted great crowds.





"Then went out to him Jerusalem and all Judea, and all the region round about Jordan;" not that every person in Jerusalem and Judea, and round about them, heard him at the same time, nor that every person heard him at all,—but Matthew means that the crowds were great from all parts of Jerusalem and Judea, and they were of all sorts, men and women, young and old, rich and poor, pharisees and publicans. To these he spoke in bold language, and warned them to flee from the wrath to come! And he told them not to boast about Abraham being their father,—that is, not to boast that they were Jews descended from Abraham; but to bring forth good fruit, that is, good works, as a good tree brings forth good fruit; and so, if they wished to be thought the children of pious Abraham, they must be pious like Abraham.

Many persons, my dear young reader, call themselves Christians because they are born among Christians; but none can be Christians indeed, but those that are like Christ. John, as the forerunner of Christ, baptized his followers who believed his message, which was to show that purity is necessary, in receiving the benefits of Christ's salvation. All, however, that John could do was to administer the outward sign; but he whom he went before, and who was soon to come, was to baptize them with the Holy Ghost and with fire, not with the sign, but with the thing signified; he could make them pure and holy; what water did for the flesh, he would do for the heart, by the power of his Holy Spirit; or what fire can do in burning up all corruption, he would do in changing the character of the soul.

He could also wisely divide between the good and the bad, who professed alike to be ready to serve God; while John was obliged to take them at their word, whether true and sincere or not. He would be like a husbandman who separated the chaff from the wheat, and by an eastern fan, used for the purpose, raised a wind so as to make the chaff fly off, and left the solid wheat behind.

Thus John was the forerunner of Jesus, and foretold his coming and character.

Our Lord Jesus from his childhood till now, when he was almost thirty years of age, had lived quietly in Galilee.

"It is supposed that John the Baptist began to preach and





baptize about six months before Christ appeared." Prior to his entering on his ministry, Christ came to John to be baptized in the Jordan; and John baptized him, though he felt reluctant to do it, and thought it too great an honour when Christ came to him for that purpose. After this was done, John saw the heavens opened, as it were; the sky looked all clear, and bright, and glorious, to his eyes, and the sweet influences of divine grace were coming gently and yet strikingly upon Jesus, "like a dove"—that is, in some form of light resembling the appearance of a dove, and mild as a dove,—or as a dove descends, and hovers, and lights.

From this circumstance, you will understand how it is that painters sometimes draw a dove descending, amidst light, on the head of Christ, and that the Spirit is represented, in some Church windows, in the shape of a dove surrounded with rays of glory.

John also heard a voice speaking from heaven, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

Thus was Jesus declared to be the Son of God.

In this chapter you read of "the Pharisees and Sadducees;" their names will often occur in these Gospels. I will next tell you who they were.

The "Pharisees" were a sect or set of men among the Jews, who professed to observe the law of God more than any others; they made a great show of their religion outwardly, and took care that everybody should take notice of them when they prayed, or did any religious service. They contrived, by these means, to gain the favour of the multitude, and their influence was at last so great, that they filled many of the best offices. They taught that men could merit heaven, and so they would not need a Saviour.

The "Sadducees" were a sort of Infidels. They believed that the soul died when the body was dead, and denied that the body would rise again. As they believed there was neither reward nor punishment in another world, they did not leave sinners to humble themselves before God, or to receive their deserts from him, but punished offenders against the law in the severest manner. While the Pharisees believed in traditions, these people believed only in the written law of Moses.





THE FOURTH CHAPTER OF ST. MATTHEW.

The Temptation of Jesus Christ.

"Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness, to be tempted of the devil."—Ver. 1.

Jesus, as the Son of God, being able to resist all sin, was now, by the Holy Spirit acting powerfully on his mind, caused to go up into the mountains of the wilderness, where, being alone, engaged in holy exercises, the devil was allowed to tempt him, as he does us, to sin. Some think that the devil appeared to him in a bodily shape; but he could tempt Christ, as he tempts us, without taking any bodily form.

Moses fasted forty days and forty nights before he delivered the law to the people of Israel; and Christ fasted forty days and forty nights before he entered upon preaching the Gospel. Thus, he was further prepared, by self-denial and holy communion, to engage in his work. During this time, his nature was supported as was that of Moses, but at the end of the time he was exceedingly hungry. Then the tempter made the first attack upon his bodily appetite, and said, "If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread." Now this was tempting Christ to doubt whether he was the divine person which he really was. Jesus could have turned the stones into bread if he would, for he afterwards turned water into wine; but he was not going to lower his divine dignity at the suggestion of the tempter, and he said, "It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." By this he meant, that God's word told us to rely upon him to find us bread when we wanted it, and that those who trusted in him need not require the power of working miracles to produce bread from stones, but only let them trust in God, and he would provide for them. The passage which our Lord quoted, you will find in the eighth chapter of Deuteronomy, and in the third verse.

Satan then urged the Saviour to go to the pinnacle—or the top





of the temple in Jerusalem, which was not far off. Some have fancied that he flew through the air with him; but no such thing is said, and Mr. Matthew Henry thinks, that Christ, perhaps, went upon the ground, and so up the stairs to the top of the temple; which is most likely. While he was here, standing over the holy city of Jerusalem, Satan suggested to him to cast himself down; and then further suggested that it was written in the word of God, "He shall give his angels charge over thee," so that he could try by this whether what God's word said was true; but if we trust in God's word, that God will keep us from any danger which we apprehend, we shall not run madly into that danger; for this would show that we did not trust his word. Jesus directly replied, with an answer from Scripture, "It is written, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God." To tempt, is to try, or put to the test; and we are never to run into danger to see if God can bring us out of it. The above words are quoted from the sixth chapter of Deuteronomy, and the sixteenth verse.

Christ was still troubled by the tempter; and having ascended a very high mountain, which commanded a large view of the surrounding countries, while viewing their extent, he showed him "all the kingdoms of the world," and presented to his mind their vast dominion, if he would only serve Satan. Perhaps his suggestion was something like this: that, with his mighty power, he should have all the idolatrous world immediately for his subjects, if he would only acknowledge Satan's power and ownership of the world and its people. Here Jesus both baffled and drove the tempter away; for he said, "Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve." Here, finally, our Lord referred to the sixth chapter of Deuteronomy, and the thirteenth verse.

Thus this vile enemy was driven away, and offered no more suggestions, for he saw that he could make no impression upon the mind of Christ, as he too often does upon our minds, when we think and do what is evil.

After this Jesus was supplied with food by angels.

John had been cast into prison, and Jesus now began to preach; so, leaving Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he





went to Capernaum, a city of Galilee, which was a province of Palestine; and thus a prophecy was accomplished about his appearing there to give the light of knowledge to the darkened understandings of men, which could see and know nothing spiritual and heavenly till he taught them;—so sadly had the people now fallen into ignorance.

Here Jesus took up the same subject which John had preached, and cried, “Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand;” for he himself was now, not coming, but come, to set it up in the hearts of many, over whom he would rule and reign.

Now it was that Jesus began to choose some disciples, who should attend him on his journeys, learn his doctrines, and see the wonderful things he would do, so that they might bear witness about them after he had left the world.

Walking by the sea of Galilee, he saw Peter and his brother Andrew, fishing; and so—for the reason just named—he bade these fishermen follow him, for he would make them “fishers of men;” meaning, that they should no more catch fish, but he would employ them to bring sinners to be saved by him. They would not leave their employment and their nets to follow every one who might choose to call them, but they could not resist the call of Jesus. There was something powerful and sweet in it, and they made no scruple to obey his command. Soon after, he saw James and John, who were fishermen also, and were in a ship, with their father Zebedee, mending their nets, and he called to them in the same way, and they also followed him.

Jesus now proceeded in preaching; and, in addition to this, he worked miracles, or did many things beyond the reach of natural means to do; and so St. Matthew gives us yet another evidence that he was the Messiah—the Anointed Saviour. He began by curing the sick; and he not only cured a few disorders, but all sorts of disorders; and he did so at a word. So, “his fame went throughout all Syria, and they brought unto him all sick people that were taken with divers diseases, and torments, and those that were possessed with devils,”—which seems to have been a particular evil then existing, as if to show Christ’s power over the devil in curing it—“and those which were lunatic, and those that





had the palsy ; and he healed them." It may seem odd, that people should run after him in all parts to get cured ; but what will not sick people do to get well ? I have known persons go in crowds in carts, or any thing they could find to carry them, to get the advice of some person famed for the curing of the sick, who visited the part of the country where the sick people were. But, in those parts where Christ travelled, it is a curious fact, that even to this day, if any physician is heard of, the people throng around him in all directions, to get his advice and assistance ; how much more must they have thronged to Christ, when they were sure to be cured by him !

We shall have other opportunities of noticing the disorders which Christ cured ; so that I need say no more about them at present.

THE FIFTH, SIXTH, AND SEVENTH CHAPTERS OF ST. MATTHEW.

Jesus Christ's Sermon on the Mount.

"And seeing the multitudes, he went up into a mountain ; and, when he was set, his disciples came unto him. And he opened his mouth and taught them."—Chap. v. 1, 2.

We now come to what is called our Lord's Sermon upon the Mount. There was no pulpit there, and, had there been one, it was not the custom for preachers to stand in a pulpit. They sat down while they taught.

St. Matthew tells us what this sermon was ; and this may be viewed as another important evidence of the Messiahship of Jesus, for his doctrine and spirit were such as proved that he was from heaven and truly divine. How grand ! how holy ! how different from all the usual proud doctrines of sinful men !

We have no room to enlarge here ; but we may just go over what are called the beatitudes, or declarations of blessings made by Jesus in this sermon. His heart was full of tenderness, and





the very first word he uttered was to bless. O, would not you have liked to have heard him? I am sure I should. And yet, my dear young reader, he speaks to us now, though not in person, yet by his word, and through his ministers, and by the secret voice of his Holy Spirit, which addresses our hearts in the means of grace; and we do not always attend to him as we ought. He says the kindest things to us, and things as divine as are here uttered, and we often forget them. So that we may each say,—

“ Oft I frequent thy holy place,
And hear almost in vain;
How small a portion of thy grace
My memory doth retain !”

But, to return to Christ's sermon, which, though not heard by us, may be read by us. His first words are—“ Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” By these he means all humble souls, who feel their need of a Saviour, as a truly poor man feels his need of charity. While many a proud rich man, and many a proud poor man too, shall be shut out of heaven, such a humble poor soul shall have a rich portion there.

Then he proceeds :—“ Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted;” that is, they that are sorry for their sins, and grieved that they have offended against a good God, shall be pardoned for Jesus Christ's sake.—“ Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth;” angry persons, full of resentment at every affront, can never enjoy any comfort of life; but meek spirits, having the temper of Christ, really inherit all the good that is around them, and enjoy it for themselves.—“ Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled;” those who find themselves guilty before God, and with a desire strong as a hungry man has for meat, or a thirsty man for drink, look for acceptance with God through a better righteousness,—or better merits than their own,—shall be satisfied with the righteousness of the Saviour.—“ Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy;” those who show mercy and kindness towards the bodies and souls of their fellow-creatures, for Jesus Christ's sake, shall receive mercy from him.—“ Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God;” and none else shall see





him in glory, but those whose hearts or dispositions are made clean and new by the Divine Spirit.—“Blessed are the peace-makers: for they shall be called the children of God.” Those who do all they can to make men live quietly and harmlessly, like real Christians, and to stop strife whenever they see it, God will bless, and they shall be owned as his children, who so strikingly bear one of the marks of his image; so you see that those who love to quarrel have no right to look for the Saviour’s blessing.—“Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness’ sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven;” this means, that those who are ill-treated by wicked people, because they are religious, shall be rewarded at last with the blessings of glory, which their persecutors, except they repent, can never enjoy.—“Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake.” Those who are called ill-natured names, or names intended to reproach them, because they serve God in sincerity, shall be blessed too. “Rejoice and be exceeding glad,” if this is the case, “for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets;” and, if they did so to the holy prophets, you must expect that they will not spare you.

My dear young reader, as you grow up, you will find people thus hating religion, and those that sincerely follow Jesus; but if you mix in all the sins and follies of the world, they will then bless and not persecute you; however, mind this, you will not be blessed by the Saviour. Which, then, is the better portion of the two,—to have the hatred, and contempt, and reproach, of the ungodly here, and the love of Christ with it, both here and hereafter, or to have the friendship of the world, and lose the friendship and favour of God?

Our divine Teacher then goes on to show what he expects from those who are his disciples. He says, “Ye are the salt of the earth;” without good men in the world it would be a complete mass of corruption; they are its salt, to preserve it from that state, just as salt, rubbed into a piece of meat, keeps it from becoming putrid. He adds, “Ye are the light of the world;” without light we cannot see and true Christians are lights to





guide the ignorant, whose minds are dark, in the way which leads to heaven.

He removes every ground of mistake about his doctrine, and shows the people that his disciples must reverence the holy law of God, and the truths taught by the prophets, and have a better righteousness or holiness than the scribes and Pharisees, who were men that made only an outside show of religion, while, in their hearts, they did not love the law of God. He shows them how much holier God's law is than they supposed, and these Pharisees taught them to believe; for instance, the Pharisees told them that when they killed another by violence, they broke the commandment which says, "Thou shalt not kill;" but then God, who knows the heart, viewed his law as broken even when they did not kill, if they were so angry that they could have killed him, or wished him dead; and violent angry words were like killing with the tongue, and so they were wicked before God. He further adds that no offering could be acceptable on God's altar while injustice and wrong was done to any one; and therefore, if any one should go to God with an offering, and recollected at the altar that he had injured another, it would be proper for him to leave his gift or offering, till he had been to the offended person, and obtained pardon.

The Pharisees taught that sin consisted in the action only, and that he who took another man's wife broke the law of God; but our Lord teaches us that he who indulges in an evil thought only, is a breaker of the law; and that therefore, if even our eye or hand in any way should lead us to do things which may corrupt our hearts—though we may not openly break the law—it ought not to be allowed for one moment; but, with a holy force—as if the very eye were plucked out, and the very hand cut off—we must turn them away from leading us to sin.

The Pharisees taught the Jews that they might get rid of their wives if they did not like them, and turn them off at pleasure; but our Lord told them, that a Christian must act differently, and love his wife to the end of her days.

The Pharisees were very particular about taking oaths, and especially if they solemnly vowed that they would do any thing for





God, they thought it highly wicked not to do it ; notwithstanding, they did not mind swearing and taking God's name in vain ; but Jesus says, "Swear not at all."

The Pharisees taught retaliation, or doing evil to others because they have done evil to us ; but Jesus tells us in this sermon that we had better bear an affront than seek revenge for it ; and, to make this plain, he uses several similitudes, one of which may serve us in this place, in which he advises us, "Whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain"—or two miles ; meaning by this, that it is better to comply with even an unreasonable request than to quarrel about it.

The Pharisees said that people ought to love their neighbours, but they allowed them to hate their enemies ; Jesus, however, teaches us a more noble feeling ; as any body, even the hard-hearted publican of old, would love his kind neighbour, and hate his enemy,—but it is only a true Christian that will love his enemy, and even try to do him good. In this he becomes like God himself, who sends his sun and rain down not only upon them that love him, but even upon those who are his enemies by wicked works. We ought, therefore to study to be like our Father in heaven.

Here the chapter closes, but not the sermon ; we must pursue it in the next chapter. But there are two sorts of persons named in this chapter which I must just notice, to help you better to understand our Lord's discourse.

The one class of persons is called "Scribes." They wrote copies of the Scriptures long before printing was known in the world, and whatever they heard of traditions, or things in the Jewish history which God's word did not record : they also read and explained the Scriptures to the people, giving their own fancied meaning to them, while the people listened to their comments with great reverence. Many of these Scribes were Pharisees, and so our Lord often couples them together.

The other class of persons is called publicans. By publican, we understand a person who sells beer ; but these publicans were not beer-sellers, but tax-gatherers, employed by the Romans to collect taxes of the Jews, who were then subject to Rome. They were a





very bad set of men, and, in gathering the taxes, generally cheated the people, dealt hardly with them, and took more from them than they ought, for the purpose of putting the money into their own pockets.

THE SIXTH AND SEVENTH CHAPTERS OF ST. MATTHEW.

Continuation and Conclusion of Jesus Christ's Sermon on the Mount.

“And it came to pass, when Jesus had ended these sayings, the people were astonished at his doctrine; for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the Scribes.”—Chap. vii. 28, 29.

In continuing his sermon, our Lord warns against making a show of our charity. Good people will always be charitable; but, if any suppose there is any merit in doing only what they ought to do, God, our Father in heaven, will take no approving notice of such a sort of charity, and will never reward it; although he will reward charity done out of love to him, and without any idea that it can deserve any reward. The Pharisees,—whom Christ calls hypocrites, because they pretended to be very pious, and were in heart not truly so,—used to give away their charity in the synagogues or public streets, so that every body might see how benevolent they were; thus they proclaimed their charity as it were with a trumpet, that men might praise them.

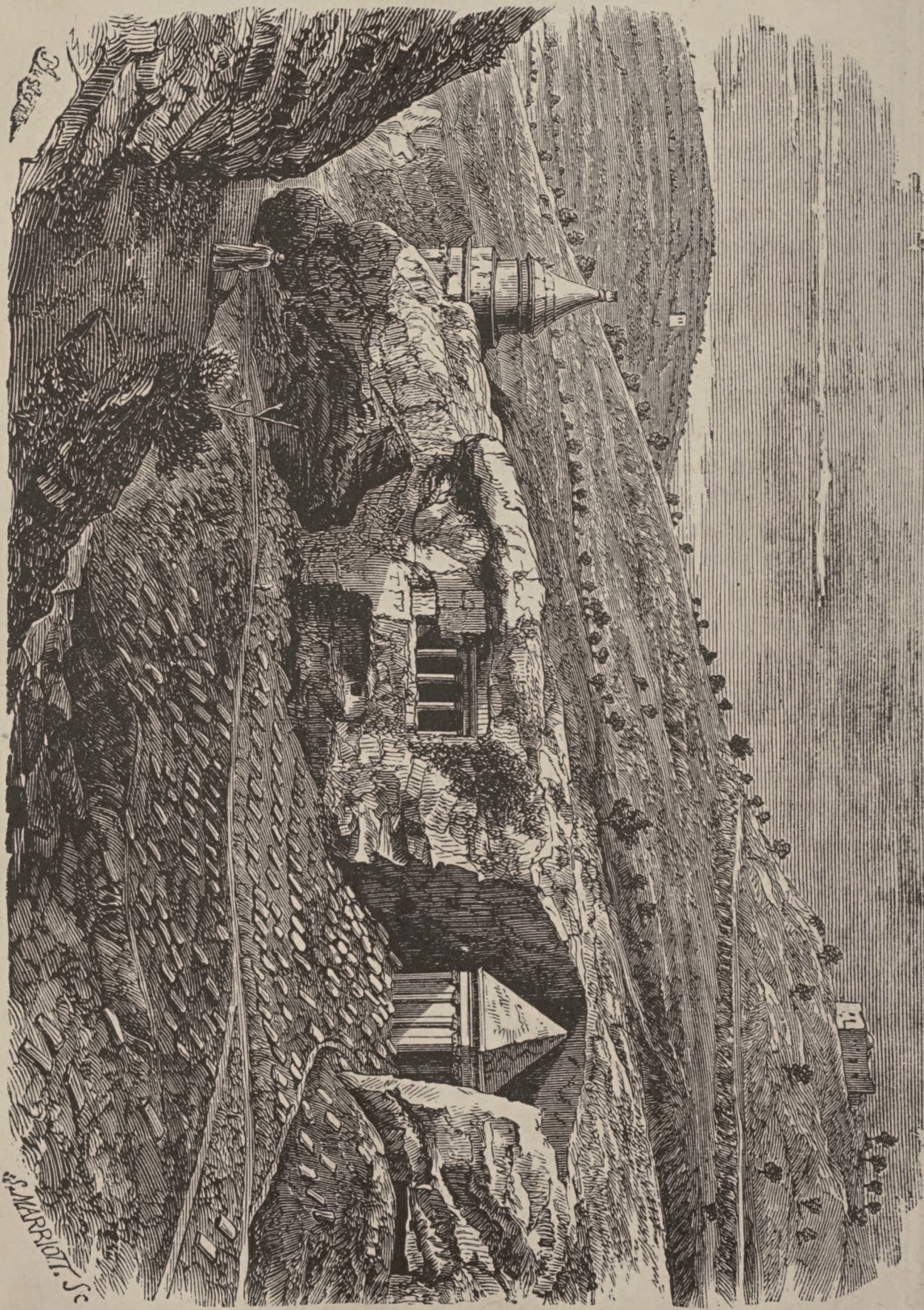
Our Lord also warns against making a show of prayer: for prayer is a matter between God and ourselves. In prayer we profess to speak to God, and, therefore, ought not to make a display before men.

Nor have we any need to repeat the same prayers over and over again, in order to make long prayers. What God wants in prayer is the heart. Yet there is an extreme; and while we are not to make unmeaning long prayers, we ought not to hurry over our prayers, as though we were glad when we had done speaking with God Almighty.





MOUNT OF CORRUPTION.





And here our Lord tells us what kind of expressions are fit for prayers, in what we call "The Lord's Prayer," which, as you probably know, I wish you well to understand. Here you address God as your father ; for, as a father, he provides for you ; you look to him in heaven, the holy dwelling of his glory ; you express a desire that his name may be treated with reverence ; you wish that he may reign over your heart, and over the hearts of others every where, and that his holy law may be done among all mankind ; you acknowledge that you live by his bounty, who gives you daily bread ; you confess your sins, which are debts to God, because they have left you short in paying God the duties you owe to him, and you ask him graciously to pardon them, as you pardon those who offend you—which I hope you do ; you ask God to preserve you from doing sinful things, which is meant by, "lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil," or from the evil one, who is Satan ; and you express your full belief that God can do all that you ask, and your desires to give him honour and praise, by ending the prayer with saying, "For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen."

Moreover, our Lord warns his hearers against making a show of fasting, and putting on gloomy faces, to appear by these to be sorry for their sins, when their hearts were never touched with godly sorrow ; but instead of letting their dress be neglected and grow dirty, as if they thought about nothing but their souls,—Christ commands the face to be washed, and other cleanly customs of the times to be observed, and in this way to express sorrow of heart, not to the world, but to the offended God.

Another warning given by our Lord is against being covetous. Most people think that if they can get plenty of money heaped together, they shall be happy ; and for this reason all the world are striving to get rich ; and, while they do so, they are too apt to forget, that when they have got their wealth,—if it is not stolen from them, or if they do not lose it in some other way,—yet they must die and leave it all behind them. And so in their concern about getting rich for this world, they neglect to prepare for another. Jesus Christ tells such persons, that, if their treasures consist in fine garments, like those laid up by rich people in the





East, the moth will by and by eat them up; or, if in precious metals, they will at last canker; or, in other treasures, they may be robbed of them; and it is, therefore, much wiser to look for a lasting portion, of better treasure—the happiness of heaven; the love and favour of God for ever, is far better than all the riches that ever were got together in this world.

Jesus Christ then goes on to warn against being insincere in religion. God says, “My son, give me thine heart.” He will not have half our hearts, but he must have them entirely. Our hearts mean our affections. We must love him better than every object beside in the whole world; because he is better to us than father or mother, sister or brother. Now, if we love God, he tells us we should always be looking singly to him, aiming to do him honour. And, if our minds are in a right state, then they will be like our eye when it is clear, and does not see things double; and we shall look more and more singly at God’s glory, and try to do his will. Then, as the good eye is like a window to let in the light which guides the actions of the body, so, the good mind of a good man receives God’s better and spiritual light from his word, which guides the actions of his soul. “No man can serve two masters,” for, while he gives his time to one he must take it away from the other; so we can never serve God and mammon at the same time. Mammon means money, and our Lord means to say, that if the heart is slavishly bent on getting money, there is no room left to serve him. And so he proceeds to say, that he is the wise man who casts all his cares upon him, not being over anxious about what he shall eat, or drink, or wear; and, those who humbly trust on his providence, shall find that he who feeds the birds of the air, and clothes in beautiful and delicate apparel the lilies of the field, will also take care of them.

The next warning which we have in this beautiful sermon is against thinking uncharitably of others. “Why,” says our Lord, “beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother’s eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye?” Do you understand this, my young reader? It means, Why do you seek to find faults in others, and not look at your own faults? A mote means a straw, or splinter of wood, that may get into the eye and hurt





it; perhaps it is intended to signify trifling faults, which we may see in others, while we have those belonging to ourselves which, when compared with these, are like a huge beam.

The next caution teaches us that wicked people are filthy as dogs, and have nothing to do with holy things.

Our blessed Lord then warns us against doing harm to any body. Why? Because God is good to us. If we sincerely pray to him, just as a kind father will give good things to his little children that ask him, so he will give good things to us. We ought, therefore, to delight in doing good, as God delights in doing good—for this is his delight; and, if we see sinners suffer, it is their own sin that makes them suffer; or, if God corrects any of his people by affliction, he does not delight in it—"in all their afflictions he is afflicted." Well, then, learn from the good God to do good. Remember this fine command of Jesus Christ, "Therefore, all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them."

Still, further, here is a warning not to follow the way of sin, because so many go in it, but rather to go with the few in the way of life. Mankind are so wicked that a few only love and serve God. Great numbers think and care little or nothing about him, and some openly declare that they hate his way of salvation. Now, a broad way is very pleasant for travelling, and a narrow way is often very disagreeable. Sin has its pleasures, but then they are only for a season, and they are gone; and religion has its difficulties, but then, they too will soon be over. Choose, then, which road would you prefer to travel, a broad and pleasant one, that ends in a place of darkness and misery, or a narrow and rough one, that ends in all that can please the eye and delight the heart. Sin's way leads to hell; but alas! many go in that broad way: the way of religion leads to heaven; but, oh! there are but few that find it. May your heart be inclined, my dear young reader, to go with this happy few!

Another warning here given is against being deceived by false prophets—that is, false preachers or teachers. At all times there have been many who have pretended to show people the way to heaven, but they knew nothing about, and did not go in that way





themselves. I fear there are many such still. But our Lord tells us how we may know them, and that is, by their fruits. That is, just as we know an apple-tree from a pear, or a peach from a plum—by the fruits they bear—so we may know who are Christ's servants, and who are not, by the works which they do. If those who pretend to show us the way to heaven live ungodly lives,—walking just as all the world walk, in the paths of folly and sin,—we may be sure that such are the false prophets against whom we are warned, and we must have nothing to do with them.

Then our divine Lord warns us also, against deceiving ourselves,—not to be satisfied with thinking that we serve him, but to be sure that we do. He tells us, "Not every one who saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven." He means by this, it is easy enough to call him Lord, and to say we are servants of Christ, or Christians; but this is not sufficient. We must show that we are so; and this can only be done by minding the commandments of Christ, and doing what he tells us to do.

Lastly, our dear Saviour concludes his sermon by a pretty and striking comparison, taken from fishermen in the East, who, to be near the sea at fishing-time, build their huts on the sands; when the storms come, and, in a moment, sweep them all away. So, he tells us, will the hopes of all those perish, who are contented with hearing what he taught, but never doing it. But, those who mind his sayings and do them, shall be like a wise man, who built his house on a rock, which floods, rain, and wind, could never sweep away. The house of the wise man fell not, for it was founded upon a rock; the house of the foolish man fell, and great was the fall of it, for it was built upon the sand. Christ himself is as a rock, on which thousands have safely rested their hopes for eternity; but this world, with all its hopes of pleasure, is but as sand; and those who build upon it for happiness, must at last lose every thing, and be ruined for ever.

Thus Christ ended his divine sermon, and the people were astonished at hearing him. All he said was so heavenly and so good; all he said was so different from what the Scribes and Pharisees had taught. And he still preaches to us in this sermon:





he still preaches to us in his holy word. May we learn of him, for he is still, by his Holy Spirit, ready to teach us—he is “meek and lowly of heart, and we shall find rest for our souls.”

THE EIGHTH AND NINTH CHAPTERS OF ST. MATTHEW.

Miraculous Cures performed by Jesus Christ.

“And Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people.”—Chap. ix. 35.

When Jesus came down from the mount, the people did not like to leave him, they were so delighted with what he had said. Crowds followed him wherever he went. If we are delighted with Jesus, though we cannot look after him with our bodily eyes, yet we shall do so with the eye of our mind—we shall often think of him, and in this way we shall follow him to see what further good we can get from him.

Matthew now tells us about a wonderful cure which Jesus performed. A poor creature afflicted with leprosy earnestly cried to him for help. If we had seen him our hearts would have felt the greatest pity for him, for the leprosy was a most miserable disease. I think I see him with his white skin covered all over with scurf, which, had it been taken off, would have shown a body full of raw wounds. Perhaps he could hardly drag his swollen limbs, with deformed joints, the effect of his horrible disease; and every one stood away from him, lest he should be infected by him. But Jesus, whose

“Heart is made of tenderness,”

was ready at once to help him; and, if others pitied him, and could not help, Christ both pitied and helped him too. He touched him, and he was cured; his word was enough to remove the disorder—“I will, be thou clean.”





But, while this proves to us that Jesus was "the Son of God," and so possessed of almighty power—able to do any thing that he pleased, it reminds us that we are polluted with a worse disease; the disease of sin has infected our souls; and that, if they are not cured, we must perish. Oh! where, then, can we go for help? Why, we may go to Jesus. He can cure this disease as easily as he cured the poor man's leprosy. He can make our wicked hearts good, and, if we pray to him sincerely so to do, we shall not pray in vain. We need pray but a short prayer, if we pray it with all our hearts and in earnest: "Heal me, O Lord, and I shall be healed."

It is said that Jesus "went about doing good," and in this he set us an example that we should follow his steps. Not, indeed, that we can work miracles, or do such things as heal the sick at a word—as he did: but we can be kind to the miserable, and give them all the help in our power.

Matthew here tells us of another wonderful cure which he did. A Centurion, or officer in the Roman army, so called, met him in a place called Capernaum, where he was dwelling; and, doubtless, having heard of his fame and readiness to do good, he humbly asked him to cure his servant. This was very kind of him, and showed that he was a good master; for some masters care nothing about the comforts of their servants, so that they can but get served by them. "Lord," said the officer, "my servant lieth at home sick of the palsy, grievously tormented." Not that the palsy gives much pain, for it is a disorder which deadens all the body, and makes it not able to feel at all, but it was a severe affliction to the poor servant to be so laid aside like a log. Doctors can seldom cure in this disease, but Christ could cure it as well as he did the leprosy; so he said, "I will come and heal him." The officer thought it was too great an honour for Christ to visit him, and again humbly asked him only to command the disease to go, and it would obey him, as readily as his soldiers did when he gave them the word of command. This was great faith in his power, to believe that he could cure the man though the man was not there. But he knew that Christ could see the man, though the man could not see him: and, as Christ delights





GENESARETH.



TIBERIAS AND THE SEA OF GALILEE.



in those who fully trust in him, he praised the man's faith to his disciples, to teach them to trust him with the same confidence ; and he told the Centurion to go home, and he would find his servant well ; and so he was, for he " was healed in the self-same hour."

The next account of Christ's curing the sick informs us, that the mother of the disciple Peter was " sick of a fever,"—a disorder that is often very severe and killing, and, if cured, it is not to be cured in a moment. But Jesus only touched her hand, and the fever left her.

At that time Satan and his wicked spirits tormented the bodies of some persons in a surprising way, as though they would prevent Christ from gaining honour by curing these victims. But these were nothing before him, for " he cast out the devils with his word."

Perhaps you have seen the sea, and how rough are its waves. If you ever saw it in a storm, it foams most furiously, and its waves swell like high mountains. It dashes against the rocks as if it would even crush them to pieces. When this is the case, the winds blow with a force that scarcely any thing can resist. In such a storm the disciples were when Christ was with them in a ship crossing the sea of Tiberias into the country of Gadara. While they were all in alarm, and " the ship was covered with waves," he was in a sweet sleep. The disciples, whose faith in his divine power was now fully strengthened, having seen what wonderful things he did, immediately awoke him, and cried, " Lord, save us, we perish !" His tender heart felt pity for their distress, and he instantly commanded the winds and the waves to be still, " and there was a great calm." Well might they wonder and say, " What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him !" Their prayer was one that we ought to pray, " Lord, save us, we perish !" For our bodies to sink to the bottom of the sea is nothing, compared with our sinking into the bottomless pit of destruction. And yet we are in as much danger of this ruin as the disciples were of sinking, if we have never cried to Jesus to save us. We are all sinners, and no sinner can ever be saved who has not cried earnestly to him to save him. My dear





child, have you ever prayed the prayer, "Lord, save, or I perish?"

The next instance of our Lord's power is the cure of two men possessed of devils. These men were a terror to every body. A mischievous drunken man is enough to frighten one; a man that is mad is worse; but a man possessed of devils was far worse than either. These men lived in caves of the rocks, where the Jewish people used to make their tombs to bury their dead, and they were so "exceeding fierce" that "no man might pass by that way." The wicked spirits that were in these unhappy bodies were in a still greater rage when they saw Christ approaching them, and they said, "What have we to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of God? Art thou come to torment us before the time?" From which question it is believed that wicked spirits will be more tormented after the day of judgment than they ever yet have been. Since these devils found that Christ would not let them keep possession of the bodies of these poor men whom they tormented, they asked to go into a herd of swine that they saw near them,—for they would rather torment these poor animals than be prevented from doing any harm at all. Now, as these swine belonged to Jews, and were kept contrary to God's law, who would not allow them to partake of them, being reckoned among the unclean beasts, Jesus, to punish the owners, suffered the devils to go into the swine, which they so tormented that they "ran violently down a steep place into the sea, and so perished in the waters."

The covetous Jews were very angry that they had lost their swine, though two of their people had been saved from cruel torments by the loss, and, having besought Jesus to leave them, he went home again to Capernaum. Poor creatures! they seem all to have been possessed, if not with devils, at least with the spirit of the devil, or they would never have preferred their swine to Christ. What benefits did they lose by sending him away! They might, perhaps, have been cured of many diseases which must have been among them, and they lost the hearing of his words who "spake as never man spake," and by which they would have been shown the sure way to heaven. Thus it is that many people still





treat Christ. If to follow him exposes their interest to danger, they are quite ready to give him up, and so they despise his "great salvation." Had they been among the Gadarenes they would have been among the first to beseech Christ to "depart out of their coasts."

Jesus, having returned to Capernaum, another man, "sick of the palsy," was brought to him on his bed, or mattress, which, in the Eastern countries, is very light and thin. Our Lord, seeing that the man himself, and his friends, believed in his willingness and power to cure him, instantly gave him relief, both in soul and body—he pardoned his sins, and he sent him home carrying the bed on which he was brought. Some of the wicked Scribes who were present, when they heard Christ tell the man that his sins were forgiven him, charged him with blasphemy, because none but God could forgive sins, and they knew not that he was "God *manifest*," or *seen*, "in the flesh." But they must have been ashamed of themselves, and put to silence when our Lord afterwards cured the man; for, as none but God could forgive sins, so none but God could say with effect to one sick of the palsy, "Arise and walk."

At this time Matthew was called to be one of Christ's disciples; Luke calls him Levi, for the Jews often had two names. He was sitting taking taxes at "the receipt of custom," or a custom-house, where duties on goods are paid to the king, when Jesus said to him, "Follow me. And he arose and followed him." So, when his grace touches the heart, sinners now leave all their wicked connexions, and are ready to give up all their worldly gains, if they stand in their way, and follow the Lord Jesus Christ, by openly professing him, and declaring in their lives whose they are, and whom they serve.

We next find Jesus at a feast given by Matthew to his friends as appears from the fifth chapter of Luke. Perhaps he wished to do them good on this occasion, and wanted them to hear what his Lord would say. His companions were publicans, or tax-gatherers, a set of men greatly despised, because they pressed people so hard to get all the money they could from them. The proud Pharisees, who thought themselves the best of men, were astonished





that Christ, who taught the people to be holy, should sit down with such company. But our Lord did not go there to countenance any wickedness, but with the design to teach them the way to be saved. "Why eateth your Master with publicans and sinners?" said the Pharisees to his disciples. By sinners they meant heathen—a name they were used to give those who were not Jews. Jesus, hearing of their question, said, "They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick." He meant, that those who felt themselves quite at ease,—as did the Pharisees,—were not such as could desire a Saviour, but others who did not presume that their hearts were good, were those to whom he, as a Saviour, would be most desirable. "I am not come," said he, "to call the righteous," as the Pharisees thought themselves to be, "but sinners to repentance." If we fancy that our hearts are very good, and that we are very innocent creatures, who have never offended God Almighty, why then we know nothing about the evil of sin, and cannot dread the consequences of offending God; and, if we pray, "Lord, have mercy upon us!" we shall do it in a thoughtless way, without any earnestness or feeling. Now this state of mind will never allow us to cling fast to Christ until we get his salvation; but poor, lost sinners, who feel that their thoughts, words, and deeds, have all been what they ought not to be, will humbly go to Christ, and while they seek mercy, they shall find it.

My young reader, I must not notice every verse as we proceed, but only make some remarks on those parts which will be read by you with the most delight. There are some portions, which you must be older than I suppose you to be before you can properly understand them; but when you understand well such as may now be explained, the rest will be read by you with extreme pleasure. Indeed, I have read the holy Scriptures for a great many years, but I always find that I have something new to learn from them, and begin now to wish that I had delighted in them as much when I was young, as I do now; for I see so much new beauty in them, that I cannot get half the time I would wish to study their holy and heavenly pages. The reading of them appears to me like walking through the garden of paradise, and gathering of the fruit of the tree of life. But let us return to our subject, and





pluck some more fruit from this precious tree; and may we so truly partake of it, that we may live for ever!

Before I notice the next miracle which Jesus performed, I must just stop to explain the seventeenth verse of this chapter, because it refers to a custom not known in England, and for that reason some have not understood it. Our Lord says, "Neither do men

put new wine into old bottles, else the bottles break, and the wine runneth out, and the bottles perish: but they put new wine into new bottles, and both are preserved." He said this

to signify that his disciples,—being men taken from active business, and not accustomed to fast, as were the disciples of John,—were not fit to bear the severity of it, any more than an old bottle could bear new wine; and, in a verse preceding—



than an old rotten garment would bear mending with a strong new piece. Now we can see why an old garment must not be mended with a strong new piece of cloth, because the new piece would tear away the rotten part by its strength and weight; but how can new wine hurt old bottles? An old glass bottle is as good as a new one, and perhaps, indeed, better, because it is seasoned—has been tried, and found good. But just one simple fact removes the difficulty: the bottles used in the East, and referred to by our Lord, were made of *leather*; and as an old shoe will burst when the *leather* is much worn, so would the old wine bottles.

A certain ruler of the synagogue, where the Jews worshipped, had a daughter lying dead; and having heard of the wonderful things which Jesus did, he believed that he was able to restore his daughter, even from death itself, and so went and worshipped him, and asked him for his almighty aid. Jesus arose from Matthew's table, where he was then sitting, and following the ruler, went with him to his house.





On his way to the ruler's house, a poor woman that had had "an issue of blood twelve years," and which she could get no one to cure, came behind him, and being full of faith in his power to cure her, she thought she would touch the hem of his garment,—the fringe which our Lord wore as a Jew,—and even that garment, hanging about his sacred person, might be the channel of conveying the healing virtue which he possessed, to her poor diseased body. Jesus knew all about what she was doing, and why she did it, and he graciously turned round to her, and said, "Daughter, be of good comfort, thy faith hath made thee whole." *He*, indeed, had made her whole; but by her *believing* in his power to heal her she had received the cure. Christ can always make us whole, and heal the wounds which sin has made in our poor souls; but it is only he who believes in the Lord Jesus Christ that can be saved. Do you believe in him, young reader? then you will not be contented to hear of him only, you will go to him where only he is to be found,—you will seek him at a throne of grace, and learn what he has to say to you in his holy word and ordinances; and so you will touch him by faith, as your hand can touch a body, and receive divine benefits from him. I can explain this no better; but, if you really go to Christ, you will *know* and *feel*, what it is to believe, more than a thousand words can express it.

Jesus then went to the ruler's house, and when he came there he "saw the minstrels and the people making a noise." This was a proof that his daughter was really dead; for the minstrels were pipers who played mournful tunes, and the noise was such as was made by mourning women, who were always employed among the Jews, to groan and cry over deceased persons. So he stopped their playing and mourning, and told them that the little maiden was not dead, but only slept;—for she was not dead to him, since he could at once restore her—but as they had seen that she was dead, they laughed at him for saying the contrary. However, he soon gave proof that death to him was no more than a sleep; and though no merely human being could awake the dead, he could. And going in, he took her by the hand, and she rose up: and the fame of this cure went abroad every where.

When he left the ruler's house two blind men followed him, and





they cried, "Thou son of David, have mercy upon us." These men believed that Jesus was the true Messiah, or anointed Saviour,—and, as he was to be of the family of David, they addressed Christ, "Thou Son of David." He let them follow him into the house, and then he asked if they really believed he could cure them. And they said, "Yea, Lord;" and, having merely touched their eyes, they received sight. Oh, the joy of these blind men! What a blessing is sight! What a poor helpless creature is he who loses it,—dependent upon others to do every thing for him, and lead him about! Yet it is far worse to have the understanding darkened,—to see no beauty in Christ, that we may desire him. And how many are so blind! Lord, give us eyes to see thee in thy word, and let our minds behold thee, as "altogether lovely."

The blind men had hardly left the house when the people brought Jesus "a dumb man, possessed with a devil." It is thought that the wicked spirit had taken away his power of speech. "And when the devil was cast out the dumb spake: and the multitudes marvelled, saying, It was never so seen in Israel." Moses, Elijah, and Elisha, were great prophets, and did wonderful things, but so many such things, and done in so wonderful a way, were never before known in Israel. The wicked Pharisees, who always hated Christ, because he exposed their deceit and pretended piety, could not deny what wonders he had done, but they said that he did them by the power of the devil. But see how they were caught in their own words, as if they were taken in a trap; for it is not likely that the devil would have given any one power to cast himself out, where he wanted to keep possession.

But we are only told a part of what Jesus did. For he travelled through many cities and villages, and every where he both preached the gospel, and performed miracles. And seeing so many flocking like sheep, to hear the gracious word that proceeded out of his mouth, he was greatly grieved for them, to observe how ignorant they were, and how neglected they were by those who ought to have instructed them. He compared them to a ripe field ready for the harvest, but there were no labourers to gather it in, and he desired his disciples to pray that more ministers might be





sent out to preach the gospel. They did pray, and their prayers have been heard, and now God's ministers are going through all the world, and their words to the end of the earth.

THE TENTH CHAPTER OF ST. MATTHEW.

Christ's Twelve Disciples.

“And when he had called to him his twelve disciples, he gave them power against unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all manner of sickness, and all manner of disease.”—Verse. 1.

This wonderful power was given to the first ministers of Jesus Christ, to prove that he had sent them to make known his gospel to the world; and the truth of his gospel having long been proved, the works which they did are not now necessary to make us believe in it.

We have here the list of his twelve apostles, which, for the sake of memory, I put down in a column, and divide into three fours.

1. Simon, called Peter.
2. Andrew, his brother.
3. James, the Son of Zebedee.
4. John, his brother.

5. Philip.
6. Bartholomew.
7. Thomas.
8. Matthew.

9. James, the Son of Alphaeus.
10. Lebbeus, whose surname was Thaddeus.
11. Simon, the Canaanite.
12. Judas Iscariot.





BURIAL OF JOHN THE BAPTIST.



THE PRODIGAL SON.



THE GOOD SAMARITAN.



Of these, the first two, Simon Peter and Andrew, were brothers. The next two were also brothers, James, the son of Zebedee, and John.

The last among the next four was Matthew, the writer of this gospel; and the last of the last four—was Judas Iscariot, who afterwards betrayed his divine Master.

In the first verse these are called *disciples*, which means persons who *learn of a teacher*; for Christ was their teacher, and they learned from him. In the second verse they are called *apostles*, which means persons who *are sent*. These twelve were chosen as Christ's disciples, that they might be always with him, and see the wonderful things which he did, and hear the divine doctrines which he taught; and afterwards they went forth as apostles, to tell the world what they had heard and seen, and so to deliver his *message* as servants whom he had *sent*.

In doing his work they were to trust to his providence to provide for them. But, as they were to preach holy truths to a wicked world, they were to expect to be roughly used, for they would be like worried sheep in the midst of wolves. Yet they were to fear nothing, for he would protect them till their work was done.

Jesus, the master of his family in heaven and earth, was treated in the basest manner by evil men, and the most hated names were not thought too bad to give him. He who was "God manifest in the flesh," was, by way of derision, called, by some base creatures, "Beelzebub," the name of a foolish heathen idol, which signifies "the God of Flies."

And Christ teaches, that those who should receive their message, would suffer like them. The Saviour's heavenly doctrines, though so peaceable and so holy, would, from the wickedness of men, divide many families; and wicked fathers would hate their pious children; and wicked children would hate their pious fathers. Unholy mothers would not love their holy daughters who became like Christ, and unholy daughters would not like their religious mothers. But, though it must be painful for such near relatives to offend those whom they loved as of the same family, yet those who would follow Jesus Christ were never to let their





friends who did not love him be the means of keeping them from him.

However, some would be found who would treat these apostles kindly, and they should receive their reward for this kindness. Whatever is done for the Saviour is not forgotten by him. He is a good master, and happy are all they who are his faithful servants.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER OF ST. MATTHEW.

Christ's Character of John the Baptist.

“Verily, I say unto you, among them that are born of women, there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist.”—
Verse 11.

John the Baptist was at this time cast into prison. The account of this affair is given in the fourteenth chapter. The wonderful things which Jesus did were, however, told him in that place, and, as he desired that his disciples should become acquainted with Christ, he sent them to hear from his own lips what proofs he could give that he was the long hoped for Messiah. Jesus both told and showed them what wonderful things he performed on the blind, the lame, the lepers, the deaf, the dead; and how he preached the glad tidings of heavenly mercy to the poor. These were proofs enough.

Then, as soon as John's disciples were gone, he took occasion to show the character of this good man, on whose faithful ministry many of the people had attended. “What,” said he, “went ye out into the wilderness to see?” when ye went to hear John the Baptist. “A reed shaken by the wind?” They understood the meaning of his question, which was, that John the Baptist was not a timid, wavering preacher, weak and shaking like a reed—but they had had the benefit of the boldest warnings from his lips.





"But what went ye out for to see? A man clothed in soft raiment? Behold, they that wear soft clothing are in king's houses." If they had gone to see such an one when they went to see John the Baptist, they had found themselves mistaken, for he was quite a plain man, who was not concerned to make a show of himself in the world, but to prepare the hearts of the people to receive Christ.

Yet again he asked, "But what went ye out for to see? a prophet?" If this had been their expectation, they had been even more highly privileged than those who had heard the prophets, for, in hearing John the Baptist, they had heard more than a prophet, a person more excellent than a prophet—his "messenger"—one whom God had sent to be the forerunner of his own Son when he came into the world to preach glad tidings to the lost.

They had indeed heard the greatest man that ever was born; for he was prophesied of by the prophets, and pointed to the very object himself before the people which the prophets had never seen, but were only honoured to foretel.

Thus you see that true greatness does not consist of riches, or show, or talents; but it consists in our being servants of Christ, and he who is the most faithful of his servants, and is honoured with divine intercourse with him, is raised to the most exalted rank. Indeed, though John the Baptist was so great a man, Jesus said even of him, "notwithstanding, he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he." The little infant in heaven is greater than John was, for he was then exposed to the faults which belong to the best of men, while the infant that is in heaven is free from all sin, and for ever near and like his glorious Creator.

Though the people of that time were favoured with the preaching of such a man, they were but too unconcerned about it; for it is of no use to us if we only hear God's word preached, but never care whether it does us any good or not; but these people were like children at play in a market-place, where some might pipe to others to make them dance, but their piping was not minded, for the others would not dance, for they were minding something else. Here, pause a moment, young reader! Whom





besides does this resemblance suit? Is it at all like you? When good things are told you, either in the pulpit or out of it, are you minding other things? If so, I hope you will pray to God to help you to mind better in future.

But these people did not only not mind what John the Baptist said, but they even gave ill names both to him and to Christ. As they did not like the rough manners of John, nor the doctrine of repentance preached by him, and were not willing to break off from their sins, they excused themselves for not minding him by saying that he had a devil—that he was not right in his mind, like the man among the tombs. Well, Christ was very meek and gentle, and what could they say against him? Why, because he went and ate with publicans and sinners, to show how ready he was to do them good,—they said he was a glutton and a drunkard. Wicked people always try to find some excuses for their sins, and so have always something to say against those who warn them faithfully against them, and invite them to flee from them.

It was a very awful thing for these people, that when John and Christ warned them to escape from the wrath to come, they did not mind them.

As they cared so little about their preaching, and even reviled them, Jesus,—who, in his sermon on the mount,—showed how much he loved to bless,—here pronounced solemn woes against these wicked people, some of whom dwelt in a place called Chorazin, and some in a place called Bethsaida. And he also told them that their guilt would be the greater, because, while other places, such as Tyre and Sidon, had never had such privileges, they had enjoyed them, but were, notwithstanding, more wicked than the heathen who lived in those cities. As for the people who belonged to the city of Capernaum, they were yet less excusable; for they had Christ dwelling among them, and doing his wonderful works there; and still they continued wicked; so that their sin was even greater than the sin of Sodom, for which God had destroyed that wicked city. And so would he destroy Capernaum, and punish it in his just wrath.

Yet, though many rejected Christ and his gospel, some receiv





ed him. And, while people who thought themselves very wise would not learn of the Saviour, simple souls who minded his words were made wise unto salvation. He even loves babes; and little children who listen to his word, and so learn of him, shall prove that he is meek and lowly of heart, and shall find rest for their souls. If he put his commands upon them they are not grievous commands, they are only to keep them from sin, and that is to keep them from evil; so, if they bear them as a sort of yoke about them, they shall find his word at last to be true, as thousands can testify, when he says, "My yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER OF ST. MATTHEW.

The Pharisees' Enmity against Christ.

"Then the Pharisees went out and held a council against him, how they might destroy him."—Ver. 14.

One Sabbath-day Jesus was going through a corn-field in his way to the synagogue, and his disciples who were with him, being hungry, plucked some ears of corn, and ate them. Now the Pharisees, though they were wicked in their hearts, were very particular about some outward things, wishing people to think them the most pious men in the world. So they found fault with Jesus for letting his disciples pluck the corn on the Sabbath, which they considered as a sort of work, forbidden by the fourth commandment, which says, "Remember the Sabbath-day to keep it holy—in it thou shalt not do any work." (See the twentieth chapter of Exodus.) Jesus, who was always full of wisdom, gave them a prompt reply, to which they could not make any answer, for he reminded them how David ate the shew-bread when he was hungry, and that bread God had commanded to be given only to the priests, yet the priest gave it to David and his men. He also told them to recollect that the priests did work on the Sabbath-day, and that within the temple too, for they could not kill and sac-





rifice the beasts without doing work, and yet they were not doing wrong. This silenced them, and he went to the synagogue.

When he arrived at the synagogue they resolved on renewing their attack upon him; and, as there was a man there with a withered hand, they asked him if it was lawful to heal on the Sabbath-day. This they did, "that they might accuse him," for they even taught that no medicine was to be given on the Sabbath. Our Lord asked them whether it was not lawful to save a sheep on a Sabbath-day, when it had fallen into a pit; and, if a sheep, why not a man, who was of so much more value than a beast? "Wherefore," said he, "it is lawful to do well on the Sabbath-days." We may not only worship God on that day, but we may relieve the poor, visit the sick, and do other works of kindness and charity. This Christ has taught us by healing the sick, for he said to the man, "Stretch forth thine hand: and he stretched it forth; and it was restored whole like as the other." We may also do other works which are of real necessity, as lighting a fire to keep us from cold, or putting out a fire to save our property, or that of our neighbour, when it is in danger. This Christ has also taught us, by defending his disciples in plucking the corn when they were hungry.

As breaking of the Sabbath was a crime punished by death, (see the thirty-fifth chapter of Exodus) the Pharisees, instead of being thankful for the good done to the man, sought to destroy Christ for curing him, declaring that he had broken the Sabbath. Oh, how far will men go in wickedness when their hearts are hardened! How blind the Pharisees must have been not to have seen that none could have done such a cure but God, or by his power! Jesus, however, went away from them, and multitudes followed him, who, hearing what he had done, took their sick with them, "and he healed them all." That was, indeed, a happy Sabbath to all these poor creatures; they would remember it as long as they lived. However, "he charged them that they should not make him known." He did this, perhaps, for two reasons; the one to prevent the Pharisees having any more proofs of who he was, since they had already refused to believe in him from what they had seen; and the other to teach us that when we do





good we ought not to publish it abroad in every place like the Pharisees, who did all their works "to be seen of men."

Among those our Lord healed was "one possessed with a devil, blind and dumb." This cure, more than all the rest, quite astonished the people, and they said that Christ was certainly "the Son of David," meaning the Messiah, for he was to spring from David, and so Christ was his son. The Pharisees heard of this cure, but they said Christ did it by the aid of the false god Beelzebub, whom they styled "the prince of devils." Now, the devil does much evil, but never any good, and it was the height of malice to accuse Christ of doing that by the power of the devil which every one, whose heart was not obstinately set against him, must have seen was done by the power of God. This was so wicked that our Lord passes sentence against these hardened men, and since they sinned against the Holy Ghost—the Spirit of God—in saying that the devil did what none but the Almighty could do, he declared that such could have no pardon. Their hearts being steeled against conviction were equally steeled against repentance.

Some Scribes and Pharisees having now surrounded him, asked him to give them some other signs, besides those which he had given, before they would believe in him. **But**, what other signs could they want? Had he not done enough? How obstinate a thing is unbelief? Lord, soften our hearts to believe in thee! Let them not be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin! Christ would not gratify their vain curiosity, but he tells them that they shall have one sign more, and that as Jonas, or Jonah, was three days and three nights in the whale's belly, so shall the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. By this he meant his resurrection from the dead—the greatest proof that he was the Messiah. Then, as he was speaking of Jonah, he told them that they, the Pharisees, were so obstinate and wicked, that even the men of Nineveh would rise up against them as witnesses in the day of judgment, and condemn them, for they had repented at the preaching of Jonah, while they, the Pharisees, remained impenitent, though a greater than Jonas was there. I must here observe that Jonah is the Hebrew name of that prophet, but Jonas the name he bore among the Greeks.





The Queen of the South, that is, the Queen of Sheba, would also rise up as a witness against them; for when she heard of Solomon's wisdom, she went very far to hear him herself, but they would not believe in him, the Wisdom of God, who was present with them, and was far greater than Solomon.

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER OF ST. MATTHEW.

Parables—The Sower—The Tares—The Mustard-seed—The Leaven—The Hidden Treasure—The Pearl—The Net.

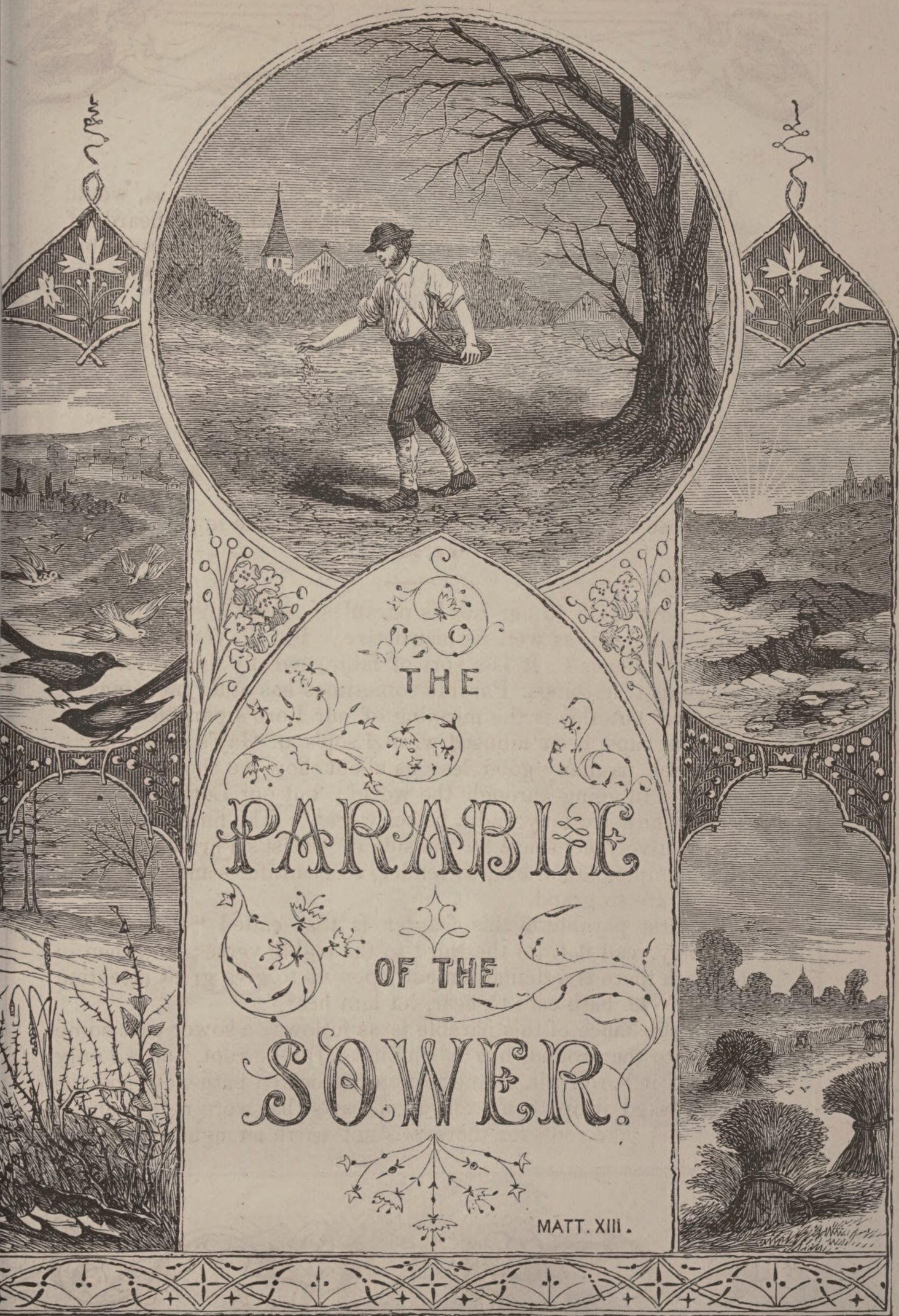
“All these things spake Jesus unto the multitude in parables.”—
Verse 34.

We now come to our Lord's parables; and they are very interesting indeed, as well as instructive. But do you know what a parable means? It is a sort of fable, and by feigned stories, teaches us true things. Parable sometimes has other meanings in Scripture, but this is the meaning of our Lord's parables. You have, perhaps, been amused with Æsop's or Gay's Fables, and they teach us many good lessons about how we should conduct ourselves in going through the world; but our Lord's Parables teach us how we may find a better world. The finest fables are comparatively nonsense by the side of Christ's Parables. They are so simple, so natural, so tender, so beautiful—and yet some of them are so grand.

The first parable in this chapter is that called “the Sower.” You may read it from the third to the eighth verse; and then in the ninth there is a demand made upon us to give great attention to it, “Who hath ears to hear, let him hear.”

The substance of this parable is as follows: a sower cast some seed into the ground, but it did not all take root, and so only some of it bore fruit. Some fell on the beaten path-way, and the birds picked it up; some fell upon parts that were rocky, and it could not take root, for there was not earth enough to allow of





THE
PARABLE
OF THE
SOWER.

MATT. XIII.

THE
PARABLE OF THE TARES.
MATT. XIII.





the roots striking, and to give them nourishment, and so the sun soon burnt the dried-up blade, and the whole plant died ; “ some fell among thorns,” and, as weeds, and wild plants, and trees, grow apace, they sprung up faster than the sown seeds, and choked it up, that it had neither room nor air to grow ; the seed was, however, not all lost, for “ other fell into good ground, and brought forth fruit,” a hundred grains, or sixty grains, or thirty grains, for one.

Our Lord himself explains this parable from the eighteenth to the twenty-third verses, which you can also read. The *sower* was himself, and it may also mean every *minister of his gospel* ; the *seed* which he sows when he preaches, is the best of seed—*God's word*. The *ground* on which he sows is the *heart*. Now, when he sows, sometimes “ the wicked one” comes and takes away the seed ; and, when we do not pay attention, we let the devil get into our minds, and like the little birds with the seed, he carries away from us all the good we might get. At other times we hear the word with great pleasure ; we are delighted to think on the goodness, and love, and mercy, of God. The kindness and love of God our Saviour makes us feel as if we could hear about him always ; but, if any wicked persons find fault with us that we are too religious, then we are in danger of minding what they say, and of thinking too lightly of the joy we felt when we heard the gracious truths of the blessed gospel ; and so we are like the stony-ground hearers, for the seed withers in our hearts, instead of taking root. At other times, we let bad, foolish, and vain thoughts, enter into our minds while we are hearing, and these become so numerous that there is not room for any thing better to enter. Then it is, that the word in our hearts resembles the seed sown among thorns. I fear, if you ask yourself how you often hear the word, you will find that you are too much like the thorny-ground hearer. But, if we hear the word, if we understand it, and if we bring forth fruit, and are holy in our thoughts and lives, then the good seed takes root, and we show that we have not received it in vain. We ought to feel very much grieved, that, when God's servants sow the good seed, so small a portion of it takes root in our hearts.





" Oft I frequent thy holy place,
And hear almost in vain ;
How small a portion of thy grace
My memory doth retain !

" Great God, thy sovereign power impart
To give thy word success ;
Write thy salvation in my heart,
And make me learn thy grace !"

The next parable is, "The Wheat and Tares." You may read it from the twenty-fourth to the thirtieth verse. Our Lord likens the kingdom of heaven to a man who, after sowing good seed in his field, finds it mixed with tares, a weed that chokes up the wheat ; which an enemy had sown in the night-time. When the tares sprung up, the servants, who knew that their master had sown nothing but good seed, wondered to see the tares among it, and went and told him, and asked him if they should pull them up. But he told them to "let both grow together until the harvest," and then he would burn the tares and save the wheat.

You will often find our Lord using the expression, "the kingdom of heaven." But he does not mean by it, the state of blessedness to which all that are made holy go when they die. That, too, is the kingdom of heaven, which we may call the kingdom of heaven *above* ; but there is a kingdom of heaven *below*. All that hear the gospel are within the boundaries of this kingdom. Christ, in his gospel, asks them to become his subjects ; and those who submit to his laws in this kingdom *below*, are prepared for the kingdom *above*. There are, however, many that do not submit to them ; these are mixed with those that do, and are like bad seed among the good. Well, they must both grow together now, but they will not always grow together. The day of judgment is coming, and that will be the harvest. Then the wicked will be burned, and the good will be laid up like precious wheat, as treasure in a store-house. Our Lord being asked by his disciples to explain this parable, has done so in the thirty-sixth and following verses, where the meaning is more particularly pointed out.

We have then a short parable of "The Treasure." It is all contained in the forty-fourth verse. A man spies a treasure in a field—perhaps a mine which nobody has ever found out—and he is so eager to get the treasure that he goes directly and sells





every thing that he has, and buys the field. In the kingdom of heaven there is a rich treasure. The gospel is the field where it is to be found. Here are "durable riches." If we seek diligently we shall discover something better than gold and silver, for gold and silver will leave the soul poor at last; but the treasure of the gospel we may carry with us when we die. Treasure is any thing valuable, and in the gospel we find what is most valuable. To a guilty sinner who knows his guilt, pardon is a treasure worth millions of worlds; to a dying man who sees the dark grave before him, "life and immortality" are treasures of the most precious kind, and these "are brought to light by the gospel." Oh, who would not find these treasures! Dear young reader, "seek, and ye shall find."

In the next two verses, we have another parable of "The Merchantman." He was trying to find out some goodly pearls, that he might gain by them; and at last, he met with one, and parted with every thing he had that he might get it for himself. Merchants in the East travel about very much for the purpose of procuring precious stones and pearls; and in such a case as that supposed, a merchant might have to take great pains, and go a great way to sell all, in order to buy the one precious pearl. Now, what is the pearl of great price? All the people in the world are busy trying to get rich; but here is a treasure which if they do not find, they will at last be miserably poor. Ask the *real* Christian, my dear reader, and he will tell you at once:

"CHRIST is the pearl of greatest price
My heart exulting sings,
For I this precious pearl have found,
And scorn all meaner things."

"Jesus Christ," says Mr. Henry, "is a pearl of great price, a jewel of inestimable value, which will make those that have it rich, truly rich, towards God: in having him, we have enough to make us happy here, and for ever." Those that feel assured Christ is theirs, are always happy, come what will. If they are poor, yet they are happy, having Christ, for they then possess "all things;" and they know that all things that are really good for them are bestowed upon them: and if they are rich, they





value Christ as their best treasure. Other things may appear very valuable now, but when people come to die they must leave them all behind, and then they see how little they are worth. Hence, many good men when they were dying have said, "None but CHRIST, none but CHRIST."

The parable of "The Net" follows next. It is in the forty-seventh and following verses. It is similar to the wheat and the tares, only here they are changed to good and bad fishes which are caught in a net, and when drawn ashore the good are preserved, and the bad cast away. After explaining the wheat and the tares, you will at once see the meaning of this parable.

Then comes "The Householder." "Every Scribe which is instructed into the kingdom of heaven, is like unto a man that is an householder, which bringeth forth out of his treasure things new and old." The teachers among the Jews were scribes. Our Lord, therefore, was now bringing up his disciples to be teachers, and he meant by this, that if they were good teachers, they would be like a good householder, who had both old and new things to set at his table. Parables are agreeable things; they have a new form, and entertain as well as instruct. I would ask you, my readers, as Christ asked his disciples, "Have you understood all these things?" I have taken pains to explain them, and I hope you will take some pains to understand and remember them.

We are told, at the close of this chapter, that people were every where astonished at Christ's wisdom; especially were they surprised who heard him speak where he was brought up. His reputed father was a carpenter; and they said, "Is not this the carpenter's son?" Some persons are such bigots that they think if a man is not born of high rank, he can know nothing. Men of high rank have, indeed, the opportunity of getting more knowledge than those who labour for their bread, but they do not always use that opportunity well; and many a poor man, with good gifts bestowed upon him by God, and with a thirst after knowledge, may be much wiser than a rich one. But, the knowledge of Christ was that of the Son of God. Yet, because he did not take the form of a rich man, but "for our sakes became poor," the silly people thought it strange that he should know so much.



JESUS WALKING ON THE SEA.





CHRIST BLESSING LITTLE CHILDREN.



and be able to teach the way to heaven, even better than the learned scribes. "And they were offended in him." They did not like to be taught by him, and so, as they despised his teaching, "he did not many mighty works there, because of their unbelief."

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER OF ST. MATTHEW.

*The Martyrdom of John the Baptist—Christ feeds the multitude—
Christ walks on the sea.*

"Mighty works do show forth themselves in him."—Ver. 2.

The first thing that is related in this chapter, is the martyrdom of John the Baptist. He was killed by Herod the Tetrarch. This was not the Herod who killed the infants of Bethlehem, but one of his sons. *That* Herod was called Herod the Great, but *this* was called Herod Antipater. When his father died he divided the kingdom into four parts among his four sons, and this son had Galilee, of which he was tetrarch, that word signifying that he had a *fourth part* of the government.

This Herod, like his father, was a bad man. His brother Philip having lost his power and retired into private life, Herod lured away his wife Herodias, who, being a wicked woman, was easily induced to leave Philip, and married Herod. John the Baptist had boldly reprov'd him for this crime, and he cast John directly into prison, and, indeed, would have killed him at once; but as John was esteemed by the people as a great prophet, he feared that they might rise and rebel, and so he contented himself with confining him.

At last his death was determined. Herod kept his birth-day with all the splendour of a prince, and there was a merry dance. Among the rest, "the daughter of Herodias was there." She, too, had deserted her unfortunate father. I am not then surprised that she could be guilty of the cruelty she afterwards displayed,





for she seems to have been an apt scholar in following the wicked example of her mother. This young creature danced before the court, and Herod was so much delighted that she should be present to countenance his evil connexion with her mother, that he praised her much for her dancing; and perhaps she might indeed have been very superior in the art, and so this allowed him the better to flatter her. He probably thought, also, that he should please her mother by the compliment; and, to show his satisfaction, he declared, with an oath, that she should have any thing she asked, even to the half of his kingdom: not that he would have given half his kingdom away, but this was an Eastern method of speaking, which allowed the person to whom it was addressed to ask a very great favour. You remember that Ahasuerus made the same promise to Esther. Esther, however, saved many lives by her request; but this wretched young creature asked for the life of one of the most excellent of men; she asked for the head of John the Baptist. Her mother urged her on to make this request, but she was as wicked as her mother in making it. When we are told to sin, even a parent's commands are not to be obeyed, because God is above our parents, and all sin is an offence against God. This was a great sin, to demand the life of an innocent man. His only offence was for reproving what she and her mother knew to be wickedness. It was not, however, enough that she should ask the head of John the Baptist, but she must have it in a charger, or large dish. This was to satisfy her mother that there was no delay, but that John was actually put to death; and also to prevent Herod changing his mind, that, on more sober reflection, his heart should not shrink back from the murder. The Evangelists say "the king was sorry; nevertheless, for the oath's sake," he granted the request. Such an oath had better have been broken than kept. The deed was a far more wicked thing than breaking his word. However, he "sent and beheaded John in the prison;" and the young Salome took the head and handed it to her mother, who satisfied her evil eyes with the sight of her faithful reprover's countenance, quiet in death. Some think that this was all a plot; that Herod's admiration of Salome's dancing, and his oath, and her request, and his sorrow at it, were all feign-





ed; and that to avoid displeasing the people, he contrived to shelter himself by these contrivances. No doubt, at the moment, they were all well pleased to get rid of so bold a monitor; for the wicked do not usually like to be told of their sins. However, conscience would sting, for our sins will sometime or other be sure to find us out; and one proof of it was, that when Herod heard of the "mighty works" done by Jesus, he was quite alarmed, and feared that it was John the Baptist come again to life. This alarm was, indeed, without any reason, for John never performed any miracles; but still when he heard of the wonderful deeds of Christ, he could think of no other than the murdered John. A guilty conscience is the most distressing enemy in the world. Oh, let us fear to sin against God, and dread to injure those who faithfully serve him, lest our consciences should become our enemies, and torture us like that of Herod.

And now for awhile Herod, Herodias, and Salome, were most likely at ease,—for conscience often goes to sleep, but only to wake again in a greater fright; but at last it must have been let loose upon them like a roaring lion, when God punished them for their sins. History tells us that when Herod had put away his lawful wife to make room for Herodias, Aretas, king of Petrea,—who was father of the former,—made war against Herod, and totally destroyed his army. Moreover, at the instigation of the wicked Herodias, he tried to dethrone his brother Agrippa, who ranked higher than he, bearing the royal title, and not that of Tetrarch. Agrippa, however, outwitted him, and procured his banishment to Lyons, where he and Herodias disgracefully died. Salome is also reported to have come to an awful end, and if she had a moment for thought, she must have remembered her cruelty to John the Baptist; for going over the ice in winter, it is said the ice broke, and she slipped in up to her neck, and her head was cut off by the sharpness of the ice. "Thus," says a great writer, "God required her head for that of John the Baptist, which, if true, was a remarkable providence."

These stories, you must remember, are not in the Scriptures, for then we should not doubt a word about their truth; but other history is liable sometimes to be altered very much, and so we





cannot always fully rely upon it. Most likely, however, these statements of history are not far from the exact truth.

John's disciples took the body of their master, and gave it a decent burial.

When Jesus heard that John was cruelly put to death, he left the place to avoid Herod, for he had yet many works of mercy to do before he should leave the world. On his departure multitudes followed him, and "he healed their sick."

Having led them into a desert place, the people were very hungry and weary, and Jesus felt compassion for them. But there were no less than "five thousand men, besides women and children;" and how were so many to be fed? All that the disciples had were five loaves and two fishes; and what were they among so many? With Jesus nothing was impossible. "He commanded the multitude to sit down on the grass, and took the five loaves and the two fishes, and, looking up to heaven, he blessed and brake, and gave the loaves to his disciples, and the disciples to the multitude." You see Jesus would not take a meal without looking up to heaven for a blessing. I hope you always do the same, and that not in a hurried or thoughtless manner, but in a serious way, as though you were in earnest. It is wicked to trifle with God. "And they did all eat, and were filled; and they took up of the fragments twelve baskets-full." This was, indeed, a miracle; and no one could have done this, if he had not had power from on high.

Jesus now dismissed the multitude, and sent his disciples across the sea of Galilee, while he went up into a mountain to pray. Jesus prayed! Do you pray, or merely *say* your prayers? for there is a great difference; we may *say* prayers, and never think about what we are saying; never feel our need of what we ask. We have need to pray, "Lord, teach us to pray!"

In the midst of this night the ship in which the disciples were sailing was overtaken with a violent storm, and they were in the greatest danger of going to the bottom. The Jews divided the night into four parts, relieving their guards on the watch-towers every three hours, and so they reckoned time by these watches.





“And in the fourth watch of the night,” which was between three and six in the morning, Jesus went to the disciples, “walking on the sea”—another proof of his divine power, who could make the sea, where he pleased to tread, as solid as the earth itself. The disciples were more frightened at the appearance of Christ than at the storm; but Christ spoke kindly to them. And Peter, having asked his leave, went to meet him on the water, for he could make it as firm for Peter as for himself. Peter went a little way, but his faith in Christ’s power failed him, and he began to sink; and then he cried out, “Lord, save me!” Jesus caught him by the hand, lifted him up, reproved him for his want of faith, and led him safely to the ship. As soon as they were in the ship the sea was calm. All the passengers and crew saw most plainly that Jesus possessed nothing less than Almighty power, to do what he did, and they then “came and worshipped him, saying, Of a truth thou art the Son of God.”

After this they landed in Gennesaret, where Christ performed more miracles.

THE FIFTEENTH CHAPTER OF ST. MATTHEW.

*Christ rebukes the Pharisees for teaching unkindness to parents—
Cures the daughter of the Syro-Phœnician woman—Feeds the
second multitude.*

“Then came to Jesus Scribes and Pharisees which were of Jerusalem.”—Ver. 1.

The fame of our Lord’s doings so much vexed the Scribes and Pharisees, who hated Christ, because he reproved their sins, and exposed their hypocrisy, that some of them are supposed to have been sent from the Sanhedrim,—or council of them that sat at Jerusalem as a sort of Parliament,—in order to watch his conduct, and examine him, and discover some fault in him before the people.





Having observed that his disciples never washed their hands just before their meals—which was a custom they taught themselves, as being in their view very religious—they asked Christ why he allowed his disciples to neglect it. Christ, in return, asked them a question, which was at the same time a keen answer to their inquiry. He wished to know why they observed the commandments of men, and yet broke God's commandments to honour father and mother. For they did so when they taught that any man might deny his parents help if they were poor and wanted it, if he only said Corban, a word signifying a gift, to any thing they asked; which then meant that that thing was devoted to the service of God, and was to be given for religious purposes.

Now this was very base, cruel to the parents, disobedient to the law of God, and raising the word of men above it, by making their law about Corban above his commandment; and it was hypocritical, pretending to give to God what they did not like to give to their parents.

Then our Lord called the people around him, and showed the iniquity of these Pharisees, that their doctrine was vile, which set aside the commandments of God, and that it was not the meat going in at the mouth that defiled a man, even though he might not eat it with clean hands, but that which came out of a man's mouth defiled him—his evil doctrines and words, which sprung from his evil thoughts, as they also sprung from an evil heart.

The Pharisees could say nothing in reply, but were sadly offended, and as they were an obstinate set of men, our Lord told his disciples to let them alone, and have nothing to say to them; for they were blind in their understandings, and the people that followed them were also blind; and if a blind man lead a blind man, why then both must fall into the ditch. That is if the people would hear such teachers in preference to himself, they must take the consequence, and be ruined.

Jesus now left the land of Gennesaret and went into the coasts or borders of Tyre and Sidon, two principal cities of Phoenicia, a renowned country at that time. And a woman of Canaan, or





Phœnicia—for both names meant the same—met him. You have probably often heard her called the Syro-Phœnician woman, a name given to persons in that part, because Phœnicia bordered on Syria, and indeed, it had formerly been a part of it by conquest. This woman, it seems, had heard of the fame of Jesus, and she believed, very strongly, that he could help her out of the greatest distress.

She had a daughter grievously tormented by a violent disorder, resembling madness, and the evil spirit ruled over her troubled mind and body. The instant she saw Jesus, she cried earnestly to him to have mercy on her, and cure her daughter; and she called him, "Lord," showing her faith in his divine power, and, "Thou Son of David," owning him as the Messiah, the anointed great deliverer who was to save from sin. Jesus, however, never noticed her; but he knew how great was her faith, and he wished to show it to his disciples. Still she cried out, and still he was silent. The disciples then entreated him to grant her request, and send her away. But he said he was only sent "to the lost sheep of the house of Israel," meaning that he intended to confine his own ministry to the Jews, and not then to have any thing to say to the Gentiles—the people who were not Jews.

The woman was not, however, to be silenced; "she came and worshipped him, saying, Lord, help me!" This was a very short prayer, but it was a very fit one, and a very earnest one; and if you do but offer up this prayer from your heart, it must and will succeed, and the Lord will help you.

Jesus said, "It is not meet," or proper, "to take the children's bread, and cast it unto dogs." By the *children* he meant the Jews, the only nation that maintained amongst them any of the pure worship of God their heavenly Father; by the *bread* he meant the word of truth and life which he preached, and which was bread to the believing soul; and by *dogs*, the Gentiles, for so they were esteemed by the Jews, being so unclean in their worship and practices. The woman knew what he meant, for in this way the Jews spoke of the Gentiles, and as she lived near them, she knew their way of speaking.

Well, she would not take any denial. She knew that Christ





could help her, and she still pleaded with him. "Truth, Lord," said she, "yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their master's table." As if she had said, I own all this, I am a Gentile, and thy favours belong to the Jews; I am no better than a dog, for I feel that I am a vile creature before thee who knowest the heart—a miserable sinner—yet as dogs may pick up the crumbs, though they may not sit at their master's table, so in mercy grant me this smallest favour, and I shall be happy; the least mercy from thee is better than the greatest favour in the world, and a crumb of thy mercy will do more for me than all the world can do.

Christ had now fully shown her faith—he commended it—he granted her request, and he cured her daughter.

This story teaches us to be earnest and persevering in prayer, and, though ever so vile, a gracious Saviour will at last have mercy on us.

From the coasts of Tyre and Sidon Jesus went to the sea of Galilee—to the parts near it; and there, upon a mountain, he was visited by "great multitudes," and he cured numbers in all sorts of disorders. There were at this time four thousand men with him, "beside women and children." After being on the mountain for three days, and using the little provision they might have with them, they needed some refreshment; and here again Jesus performed a great miracle, and multiplied seven loaves and a few little fishes, so that "they did all eat and were filled. And they took up of the broken meat that was left seven baskets-full."

After this he removed to Magdala, a place not far from Tiberias, and after which it is thought Mary Magdalen was named, of whom we shall by and by read.





THE SIXTEENTH CHAPTER OF ST. MATTHEW.

The Pharisees and Sadducees tempt Christ—Peter's Confession about Christ.

"The Pharisees also, with the Sadducees, came, and tempting, desired him that he would show them a sign from heaven."
—Ver. 1.

The Pharisees and Sadducees now came to Christ to try him again, and as he had done so many miracles, they asked him to show them some sign from heaven, such as making the sun and moon stand still, like Joshua; or raining manna, as in the days of Moses. But Jesus would not give them any more proofs of his divine power, after he had performed miracles enough to convince any honest mind that he was the Son of God; and which, if they had not themselves seen, they must have heard of from so many others, that it was the most wicked obstinacy not to believe. So he only told them that they could know the weather by the look of the sky, as we do; when it appears bright, we say, "it will be a fine day;" and when cloudy, we say, "it will rain;" and if they would use their senses as much respecting the coming of the Messiah, they would "discern the signs of the times," and that many things were taking place which the prophets foretold should happen when Messiah should visit the world.

Then Christ left them, and warned his disciples against these wicked men, telling them to "beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, and of the Sadducees," meaning their doctrines, which they must beware not to take in, or they would poison their minds, as bad bread would their bodies.

When Christ came to Cesarea Philippi, or Baneas, he put his disciples' faith to the test; and after asking them what the people in general thought and said about himself, he put the question to them, "But whom say ye that I am?" He knew well





all that men said, but he asked the question to lead to the second question, by which he might get a confession of their faith, after all they had seen him do. Peter, who was always forward in speaking, said, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God!" that is, thou art the anointed by the Holy Spirit of God, to be the King of thy spiritual people Israel;—the true Messiah, and not a mere man, but the divine Son of God. Jesus then commended his faith, and for the information of the disciples around, told him that such knowledge was only given from heaven. Many saw Christ do his miracles, but they did not see his divine glory as Peter did. On this rock, on the dignity and glory of Christ, the Son of God, as on a sure rock, will he build his church; on him all believers rest, who are what make up his church, and hell, with all its powers, shall not prevail against it. Christ told Peter also that he would give him the keys of the kingdom of heaven. You know that I told you, in explaining the parables, what the kingdom of heaven meant, and that all that heard the gospel were in the boundaries of this kingdom, so that it means the spiritual privileges which Christians enjoy in this world, as well as their happy state in the next. Now, there are no *keys* used in this kingdom; the expression is what we call a figure of speech. The keeper of the key of a city is a person of *authority*, and when Christ told Peter he would give him the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatsoever he should bind on earth should be bound in heaven, and so on; he merely meant that he would entrust him, as his faithful servant, with the preaching of his gospel, so that he should have authority to explain what was his truth, since he had so nobly declared it, and what, under the guidance of his Spirit, he declared to be so, should be so, and whatsoever he declared not to be so, should not be so.

Christ then commanded his disciples to be still for the present, and not to make him known as "the Christ, the Son of the living God;" for, had they done so, the Jews would have proclaimed him as their king, but he came into the world for a very different purpose than that of reigning as an earthly monarch. From this time, therefore, he more fully explained to his disciples why it was that he would not be an earthly king, and that he must suffer, &c.





THE PARABLE OF THE UNMERCIFUL SERVANT. MAT. XVIII.





killed, and raised again the third day. Peter, indeed, could not bear to hear of this, for he loved his Master, and could not without grief think of his suffering, besides which, he would rather have seen him king over the Jews. But our Lord reproved him, and said, "Get thee behind me, Satan!" intimating that the evil spirit had suggested the thought of opposing his final suffering, for with that he was to triumph over Satan's kingdom.

He then warned his disciples of the great dangers to which they would be liable if they were true to his cause, and that they must always consider themselves like men having a cross to carry, on which they were to be executed, an allusion they well understood as a mode of execution then in practice. Thanks be to God, our lives are not in danger in our happy country from any attachment we may avow to Christ; but if we are steady and consistent followers of the commands of Jesus, we shall find the wicked world still hating us, though they dare not kill us. Irreligious people do not in their hearts love those who sincerely love Christ.

THE SEVENTEENTH CHAPTER OF ST. MATTHEW.

The Transfiguration of Christ.

"And after six days Jesus taketh Peter, James, and John his brother, and bringeth them up into a high mountain apart, and was transfigured before them."—Ver. 1.

This chapter informs us about what is called, "The Transfiguration." It took place on a high mountain, in the presence of Peter, James, and John. Jesus gradually discovered his power and glory to his disciples. Here the Son of God exhibited himself in great splendour, and showed that if he had the form of a man, he only dwelt in human flesh. He "was transfigured before them." To transfigure is to pass over to another form. Not that the shape or substance of our Lord's body received any alteration, but his whole appearance became heavenly instead of earthly.





"His face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light." He was all over covered with rays of glory.

There also attended upon him Moses and Elias, or Elijah, the chief of the law and the chief of the prophets. Moses had left the world fifteen hundred years before, and Elijah had been translated to heaven nine hundred years. Thus these glorified persons paid homage to him who was the only perfect doer of the law, and the great person who was the theme of all the prophets, for "to him gave all the prophets witness."

The disciples were much delighted to see their Divine Master covered with such glory; and Peter, who was always very impulsive, did but express the feelings and wishes of all their hearts, when he said, "Lord, it is good for us to be here: if thou wilt, let us make here three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias;"—such booths as were made of the branches of trees, and were used to live in during the feast of tabernacles. Peter did not like to leave the mount, but would feast his eyes still longer on the rapturous sight with which he was indulged; yet he showed that he had hardly thought enough on what he said, for what did glorified saints want with tabernacles to dwell in on earth?

But what was the design of this display of Christ's glory? It was to confirm the faith of his disciples in Him as the Son of God, and to enable them to speak with greater confidence respecting him, when they should hereafter preach him, than they could merely from seeing his miracles. Those miracles, indeed, showed great power, but Moses and Elias had done miracles, and though Christ's were performed in his own name and by his own authority, while theirs were done in the name of the Most High God—which showed he was far above them—yet, this transfiguration proved him beyond all doubt to be a Divine Person. Glorified saints paid no such respect to mortals. No mere man was ever surrounded with such glory, not even Moses when his shining face dazzled the people after he had conversed with God on the mount. And then "a bright cloud overshadowed them," and a voice from heaven proclaimed the Lord's dignity, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him."



This enabled the disciples to speak boldly about the dignity of Jesus, and to declare that he was more than a mere man. A long time after, when Christ had been crucified, Peter bore this witness concerning him : " We have not followed cunningly devised fables," meaning idle and fanciful stories, " when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eye-witnesses of his majesty ;" that is, we did not go by hear-say of what others saw, but we saw him in his glory ourselves. " For he received from God the Father honour and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. And this voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with him in the holy mount."

So you see the reason of this transfiguration : it was to enable the disciples to tell others of what they had seen and heard about the glory of Christ, that they might believe in him too. In declaring these truths they laid down their lives rather than give them up ; and they have left them for us also to believe. After this, we cannot think too highly of Christ. He is " the brightness of the Father's glory : " and in heaven he is " the light thereof."

The disciples were struck with awe at this grand sight, and fell on their faces ; but Jesus encouraged them to rise, and then Moses and Elias had disappeared, and his glory no longer shone, and he was as before. But he told them to keep all these things secret till his work on earth was done.

We next read of Christ curing a lunatic who had been brought to the nine disciples while the three were on the mount, but they could not cure him. " And Jesus rebuked the devil," with which he was troubled, " and he departed out of him." Our Lord blamed his disciples that they had not done the same ; for, though they could not by their own power, yet by faith in him they could cure him.

Again our Lord reminded them that he must be killed and rise again. This was intended to prepare his disciples for that awful event when it came to pass.

In this chapter we also read of Christ's paying the tribute money at Capernaum. This was a half shekel paid yearly, for the





service of the temple. As he was the Son of God he was not liable to pay a tribute, but, lest offence should be taken on account of his refusal, he preferred to do it. Yet it appears, he who had the world at his command, chose to be so humble and poor for our sakes, that he had not the small sum wherewith to pay this tribute money. So he worked a miracle to obtain it. He chose so to do, to show his disciples that if he was poor, it was not because he was obliged to be so, but because he chose to be so, and to give them additional proofs that he knew all things, and could do all things. He knew that in the midst of the sea there was a fish that had swallowed the sum of money he wanted, and he told Peter to go and cast in his hook, and catch him, and pay with the money the tax that was demanded for him and Peter.

THE EIGHTEENTH CHAPTER OF ST. MATTHEW.

Christ teaches humility, kindness, self-denial, and forgiveness of injuries.

“Whosoever, therefore, shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven.”—Ver. 4.

Christ here teaches us not to be proud. His disciples asked him, “Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” Our Lord knew their thoughts, he knew also that they had been talking to each other about this subject. They did not yet clearly understand that his kingdom was to be a spiritual kingdom; and supposing that he would yet reign over the Jews in Jerusalem, they had almost quarrelled among themselves about who had the right to be his chief officers in managing his government.

“Peter was always the chief speaker, and already had the keys given him, and he expects to be Lord Chancellor, or Lord Chamberlain of the Household, and so to be the greatest. Judas had the bag, and therefore he expects to be Lord Treasurer; which, though now he come last, he hopes will then denominate him *the greatest*. Simon and Jude are nearly related to Christ, and they





hope to take place of all the great officers of state, as princes of the blood. John is the beloved disciple, the favourite of the prince, and, therefore, hopes to be the greatest. Andrew was first called, and, therefore, why should he not be preferred?

Mr. Henry supposes that some such thoughts as these passed between them when they asked Christ to settle the matter. A little child happened to be near, and Jesus took and set him in the midst of them, and told them that unless they were as humble as that little child they could never enter into his kingdom—the kingdom of heaven, and that the humblest among them was the greatest.

See, then, from this, what Jesus thinks of pride. Pride of relationship, pride of abilities, pride of dress,—all kinds of pride, would have been rebuked by our meek and lowly Saviour. A little child has no pride, neither should we have it. What! pensioners on God's bounty for daily bread be proud? Sinners be proud? God forbid!

Again, Christ here teaches us not to give offence. We should be careful, as much as possible, to offend nobody in any way. But the offence of which he here speaks is particularly against his humble followers and servants. We must not despise one of these his little children, how poor and despised soever he may be by a wicked and sneering world. The world will needs despise them, for it hates all true religion; it does not always dislike the appearance of it, but it cannot bear it when it is decided and sincere. Such must take the consequence and endure the woe which belongs to giving offence.

Christ also here teaches us self-denial, to part with things that we even dearly love, rather than lose our souls. He tells us that we are to cut off our hand and foot, and pluck out our eye, rather than let them stand in the way of our salvation. He does not, however, mean that we should really do so, but he does mean that whatever hinders it, if it be even as dear to us as these parts of our body, we must be ready to give it up. An amusement, though ever so delightful, if it leads us into sinful habits and company, must be parted with. A friend and companion that would draw our hearts away from Christ, though we love him ever so much for





his kindness in other respects, must also be parted with. Many such right hands must be cut off, and many such right eyes must be plucked out.

Another thing here taught is forgiveness of injuries. And this is a very hard thing indeed to learn. When Christ talked on this subject, Peter wished to know how many times he might be offended by another and yet forgive him,—“Seven times?” said he. “Yes,” said Jesus, “as much as seventy times seven.” It is not likely that any one would offend so often as this, so that our Lord meant, that we should always be ready to forgive those that injure us. It is certain that when we can do it, we must have a much happier mind than the individuals who have done us harm.

Our Lord enforces forgiveness by a parable about a steward that owed his lord ten thousand talents, and yet he forgave him his debt; but a fellow-servant happening to owe the steward only a hundred pence, though he had been so kindly treated by his lord under like circumstances, yet cruelly threw his poor fellow-servant into prison till he should pay him every farthing. His lord, however, heard of it, and, as the steward's debt was still due in law, to punish him for his cruelty he laid hold of him and threw him into prison also.

God forgives us our sins though they are great as the ten thousand talents; we ought, therefore, surely to forgive the hundred pence due to us from others, and to pass by their little offences, when they are ready to express any sorrow that they have done us injury; and, even if that be not the case, we should not render evil for evil, but contrariwise blessing. I have seen a hard-hearted man softened by receiving kindness for injuries.

The parable I have mentioned ends the chapter; and I should like you to read it, and think over it: it begins at the twenty-third verse. There is also another parable which I have passed over. It is to show the tenderness of Christ to his little ones—to his humble followers, who are his little children, and over whom he exercises as much care as any tender shepherd over his flock. All are watched over by him, and if one go astray, he seeks it with the greatest care, and restores it to the number of his sheep.







THE NINETEENTH CHAPTER OF ST. MATTHEW.

Christ disputes with the Pharisees—receives little Children—converses with a rich young Man.

“But Jesus said, Suffer little children, and forbid them not to come unto me; for of such is the kingdom of heaven.”—Ver. 14.

Here we find the Pharisees attacking our Lord again, and asking him a question, to try and prejudice the people against him. The Jews at that time were very fickle with their wives, and separated from them for the least trifle. The Pharisees knew that Jesus would condemn this, and as that would displease the people, they tried to effect their purpose by bringing on a discourse on the subject. Jesus did not evade the question. He always condemned sin in any shape, and he said the Jews were wrong, and though Moses allowed of these separations on slight grounds, yet it was only because of the hardness of their hearts, for if he had not, they would have used their wives cruelly, whom they ought to have loved, and so to prevent this evil he allowed them to separate.

The next thing in this chapter to be noticed, is the bringing of little children to Christ, that he might bless them, and pray over them, as it was usual with the Jews to do. Most likely they were parents, or it might be friends, who brought these children to Jesus. Children should feel themselves very happy when they have parents or friends, who take them to Christ, and ask for his blessing upon them. They cannot now do this exactly in the same way, for Christ is ascended up into heaven, but they can take them in prayer, and though Christ is in heaven, he can still bless them there. They can take them to his blessed word, and in reading that they will learn what he has to say to them, and God will bless them there. And they can take them where he





has promised to give his blessing, even where two or three are met together to worship him, and he will still bless them.

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And, indeed, if poor little children have parents that will not take any care about their souls,—and I am sorry to say there are some such parents as these,—yet still they may go to Christ of their own accord. Nobody can hinder them. He can hear what their hearts say. They can pray to him, and he will bless them. The disciples thought that these parents were troublesome, but Christ did not think so, nor will he ever think you troublesome for going to him. He says, “Whosoever cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out.” What he said to the disciples he says now, “Suffer little children, and forbid them not to come unto me; for of such is the kingdom of heaven.” Oh, yes, there are thousands





and tens of thousands of little children singing praises to Jesus in heaven, and their praises are as delightful in his ears as those of any other glorified spirits, and blend as sweetly with the music of angels.

Another thing here recorded is a conversation of Christ with a rich young man, commonly spoken of as "The Young Man in the Gospel." This young man was desirous of going to heaven, and wished to know what he should do to enable him to get there. In this respect he was better than some people, who hope to go to heaven when they die, but live all their days as if they cared nothing about it. He called Christ "Good Master,"—or good Teacher,—but Christ told him there was no one good but God, and as he only considered Christ as a teacher, and did not see his divine glory, he was wrong to give any human being the title of good.

You will sometimes find Christians using this phrase, "My Good Sir," or, "be a good child;" you must, however, always understand that it merely means behaviour, and is not intended to express any thing sinless in the person so called; for there is none good, no, not one; we may be well behaved towards each other, but we have all by nature very bad hearts. "In me, that is in my flesh," says the apostle Paul, "dwelleth no good thing."

Jesus told this young man, who had no notion of believing in him as a Saviour, but only thought of doing something to become eternally happy, that if he would keep the commandments, all would be right. The young man said that he had kept them all. He did, indeed, know but little of his own heart to say so, for a wrong thought breaks the commandments, as well as a wrong word or deed. He should, as Mr. Henry observes, instead of saying, "All these have I kept, what lack I yet?" rather have said, with shame and sorrow, "All these have I broken, what shall I do to get my sins pardoned?"

Christ, however, soon put him to the test. He proved that he was an idolater, and so broke the very first commandment, "Thou shalt have no other gods before me." He did not, indeed, bow to shaped-out idols of gold and silver, as the heathen did, but still he loved his gold and silver above every thing besides—he gave





his heart to his riches, and that was sin enough. Jesus told him to sell every thing he had, and give to the poor, and follow him. Not that Christ requires this of us, he leaves us to enjoy what his providence gives us, and be thankful for it; but here was a particular case, which put this young man's heart to the test, for "when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful: for he had great possessions;" and he could not give these up to enter into life.

After the young man was gone, our Lord showed his disciples, from this example, how difficult it was for a rich man to enter heaven. Yet there is nothing to prevent a rich man going there, but his own idolatrous heart. There is the same way open to him as to others, the same Saviour for him as for others. But riches allure the heart; they have many snares, they tempt to many dangerous enjoyments, they are a trust of which it is hard to keep a good account--and so our Lord truly said, "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God." That is, it is a great difficulty for a rich man, surrounded with the snares of riches, to enter into the kingdom--for this is what the words mean; they are a sort of a proverb, like some that we use, as, for instance, when a thing is lost, and it is difficult to find it, we say, "You may as well look for a needle in a bottle of hay."

These remarks must have reconciled the disciples to poverty for the sake of their Master, and must since have made many a rich man feel cautious and humble, and many a poor man contented and happy.

Poor Peter, as I have told you before, was always ready to speak his mind, and often without thinking so much as he should have done; and now he cannot help telling Christ that, at all events, he and his brethren were different from this young man, for they had left all and had followed him. I must here quote Mr. Henry again; who well remarks, "Alas! it was but a poor all that they had forsaken; one of them (Matthew) had, indeed, quitted a place in the Custom-House; but Peter and the most of them had only left a few boats and nets, and the appurtenances of a poor fishing trade; and yet see, how big Peter there speaks of it, as if it had





been some mighty thing: 'Behold, we have forsaken all!'" However, what they had left was their all, and Christ accepts of a little sacrifice, where we cannot make a great one; yet it does not become us ever to boast of what we do for him; for what do we give up, when we think that he gave up his life for us?

The disciples of Jesus will never lose by what they give up for him; they do but exchange dross for gold. He promised the twelve, that they should each sit upon thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. Not that there will be thrones in heaven as on earth; but it means that great honour shall be theirs in the day of judgment, and they shall agree to the righteous sentence of God, when he shall try the world, and pronounce the doom of the unbelieving tribes of Israel.

THE TWENTIETH CHAPTER OF ST. MATTHEW.

The Parable of the Labourers in the Vineyard—Christ foretels his sufferings—The Petition of Zebedee's Sons—The two Blind Men.

"For the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is a householder, which went out early in the morning to hire labourers into his vineyard."—Ver. 1.

This chapter contains four things, which we shall briefly notice in the order in which they stand.

First,—*The Parable of the Labourers in the Vineyard.*

Here our Lord compares the kingdom of heaven,—or the season of proclaiming the gospel to poor sinners,—to a person who kept house and hired servants. Being in want of some to work in his vineyard, he "went out early in the morning to hire labourers." "And when he had agreed with the labourers for a penny a-day, he sent them into his vineyard." Our Lord here means a coin called the Roman penny, which was of more value than ours, and equal to about fifteen cents of our money; this, indeed, was





low for wages, but they differ very much in all parts of the world, and even in our own country, in some parts not being more than half what they are in others.

Several hours after, the householder went out, and finding more labourers wanting work, he hired them also. Three hours after that he employed some more to work, and three hours after that still more. And now it drew towards the end of the day. "And about the eleventh hour, and within an hour of finishing work, he, seeing some more standing idle, hired them also."

After they had done their work he paid them, and gave every man a penny; so that you see he gave just as much to those he employed last as to those he employed first, though, of course, they had done but very little, while the others had done much work.

Those that had done much work began to complain on seeing the others paid as much as they were; but the good man of the house told them they had no right to do so, for he had done them no wrong; they agreed to work for a penny, and he had given them their penny; and if he chose to pay the others as much as he had paid them, though they had done less, he had a right to do as he pleased with his own.

Now the Jews were very jealous of the Gentiles, or nations not of the Jews; and so selfish, that they could not bear to hear of the grace of God being bestowed upon them, after they themselves had, for so many ages, been ranked among the servants of God. This parable was, therefore, to reprove their selfishness, and to show that God has a right to do with all nations as, in his grace, he pleases; and, also, it teaches us that, if he gives us any mercies, and especially the blessings of heaven at last, it is not according to what we have done—for our services are but poor at the best—but according to his own great generosity and grace.

People who talk about meriting heaven, know not what they talk about. Can any one in his senses imagine that a poor sinful creature, whose existence here is, at most, so short, can merit, by what he does, an eternity of happiness? Heaven, my dear young reader, is always spoken of as given to us,—we can never earn it. All that we have to do is to be diligently concerned about it, and





occupied in such a manner as will show that God, by his grace, is fitting us for it. God's word will show us if we are doing his work ; and if we are not, then we shall have the worst of wages, "for the wages of sin is death."

The second thing our Lord here mentions, is the sufferings which were coming upon him. These he had twice before named to his disciples, and so he prepared their minds for the terrible event of his death. He tells here how he shall be betrayed, condemned to death, mocked, scourged, crucified, and then he must rise again from the dead. Oh, let us admire the love of Christ to us poor sinners, who, though he saw all his sufferings before him, did not shrink from them, so that he might accomplish the work of our redemption. How much ought we to love him who so "loved us, and gave himself for us!"

The third thing is a singular petition made to him, through their mother, by the sons of Zebedee, James and John, who were two of his first disciples. It was proper enough that the sick should ask him to be cured, and the blind to receive sight, and, indeed, any of the miserable that they might obtain mercy ; for "he went about doing good:" that was his errand—his delight. But, it was a most striking proof, indeed, of the secret pride and ambition of the human heart, that these disciples,—and especially, with the example of Christ's humility daily before them,—should ask what they did. It was no less than that they should have the first places of honour in his kingdom ; for, though he had told them of his death, they seemed either not to understand it, or to suppose—which was most probable—that after his death he would mount the throne of Judah, and become king of the Jews : so they asked that they might sit nearest to him when he should be king—the one on his right, and the other on his left hand. The right hand of a person of rank was always considered to be a place of honour ; and Cyrus, the great Persian king, of whom we read in Scripture, used to place the guests he valued near his left hand, because his heart was on that side of him, and he thought that being placed near that was a great sign of his affection.

Our Lord replied to the ambitious disciples,—“Ye know not





what ye ask." They were pleasing themselves with the prospect of honours, when all the time there was nothing but suffering before them. And he said, "Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of, and to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" To this they replied, "We are able." They thought that if they could have the dignity at last, a little pain or suffering would be of no consequence in the way. My dear reader, if we were but as eager after making sure of heaven, as these disciples were of an honourable place on earth, how wise and happy we should be! and about that our kind Lord has said, "Ask, and it shall be given you." Jesus then let the disciples know that they should, indeed, drink of the same cup with himself, and so be partakers of a great honour; but that cup should be sufferings; and, "if we suffer with him, we shall also reign with him." The honours of the kingdom of heaven, were, however, not given by him, who was in our flesh, but by his Father, God, who is a spirit; and mortals were not to have their pride and curiosity gratified about what he would please to do in heaven. Many persons ask very inquisitive and impertinent questions about heaven, which nobody can answer, if God has not made known the answers in the Bible. To inquire the way to heaven is quite right, and the Bible is a lamp to show our feet the way; and to learn as much about heaven as the Bible shows us, is not only right, but our duty and happiness, but beyond this we must not attempt to go.

The other disciples were very angry when they saw how these desired to be above them. But Jesus turned the request to their advantage; for he taught his disciples, instead of seeking earthly honours, to expect that, in following him, they should endure sufferings which, in that period, would be great indeed; and that if any of them wished to be great in his kingdom, the way to become so was to be useful and humble: thus they would be most like Christ himself; "for the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many."

The fourth thing in this chapter is the petition of two blind men, who were "sitting by the way side," and "when they heard







CHRIST DRIVING OUT THE MONEY-CHANGERS



that Jesus passed by, cried out, saying, Have mercy on us, O Lord, thou Son of David!" This was a request that Jesus would not deny. "The multitude rebuked them." Some who were his real friends thought, perhaps, that they were troublesome, and his enemies did not like their honouring him by calling him "Lord," and "Son of David;" but "Jesus had compassion on them, and touched their eyes; and immediately their eyes received sight, and they followed him."

"Have mercy on us, O Lord, thou Son of David!" is a cry that Jesus still hears. We cannot do wrong in urging it. If we never feel our need of his mercy, we shall never have it. Oh, let us lift up our voices to him with the humble and penitent:

"Mercy, good Lord, mercy I ask,
Mercy's the total sum;
For mercy, Lord, is all my suit,—
Oh, let thy mercy come!"

THE TWENTY-FIRST CHAPTER OF ST. MATTHEW.

Christ's triumphant Entry into Jerusalem—Christ drives the Buyers and Sellers out of the Temple—Christ sentences the barren Fig-tree—Christ silences the Chief Priests—The Parable of the Two Sons—The Parable of the Husbandmen—The Corner Stone—The Stone of Punishment.

"And the multitude said, This is Jesus, the prophet of Nazareth of Galilee."—Ver. 11.

"And when the chief priests and Pharisees had heard his parables, they perceived that he spake of them."—Ver. 45.

The first thing which is related in this chapter, is the triumphant entry of Christ into Jerusalem. Hitherto he had travelled on foot while "he went about doing good," and often was wearied in his kind work; but now he rides in a degree of state, though accompanied by none of the pomp of the earth.





Having commanded two of his disciples to go into a neighboring village, where they would find an ass tied, and a colt with her, which they were to bring to him, they did as they were told ; and there—as he had said, who knew all things—they found the beasts ready for his use. “ And they brought the ass and the colt, and put on them their clothes, and they set him thereon.”



Christ was followed by a multitude wherever he went. His fame in doing good caused many to go to him to receive benefits, and others went to see this wonderful person. These strewed the way on which he was to ride, some with their garments, and some with branches of trees, among which it is supposed were quantities of beautiful roses, which grew in those parts. This was a method of paying honour to great persons, and is still practised in the same parts of the world, and was intended to be





in honour of Christ. And the people cried, "Hosanna to the Son of David: blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest!" Hosanna means, "Save, I beseech," or "help us, we beseech thee, thou Son of David, the Messiah!" words which were used by the people at the feast of Tabernacles.

Now "all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying, Tell ye the daughter of Sion, Behold, thy King, cometh unto thee meek, and sitting upon an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass." By the daughter of Sion, is meant Jerusalem, or its people, Sion being the most celebrated part of Jerusalem. Here Christ claimed authority, being King over his church, and in token of it he rode, as the judges of old, on an ass. At this time, indeed, the great, and they only, rode upon horses; so that Christ did not enter Jerusalem in worldly splendour, but still he entered it like one bearing a high dignity. And this fulfilment of prophecy was one of the many marks which the prophets gave, by which the Messiah was to be known. Had not Christ so gone into Jerusalem, one of the marks to show him as the true Messiah would have been wanted; while every mark which so distinguished him was a confirmation of his character and office, and so must establish our faith in him.

Another thing here recorded, is Christ's entrance into the temple, or rather that part of its courts in which were daily sold frankincense, oil, wine, and other requisites for sacrifice, such as doves, lambs, and oxen. It was near the time of the passover, and as many of these were then wanted, the courts were well stocked. This custom was most likely in imitation of the heathen, who did the same in their temples. But it was profane; it disturbed the worship of God; and while the dealers often cheated the buyers, the priests were wicked enough to share in their gains. Among the traders were also money-changers; these were persons who accommodated the people with proper coin, for any foreign coin which they had taken from any of the neighbouring nations with whom they traded, and in so doing they overreached their customers, and were guilty of shameful extortions. All these things made our Lord very indignant; he could not bear to see the house of God profaned, and such wickedness practised; and he cast out





the dealers, and "overthrew the tables of the money-changers, and the seats of them that sold doves. And said unto them, It is written, My house shall be called the house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves:"—a place as bad as the caves in which robbers hid, who infested Judea.

That Christ should have disturbed these people, and, though numerous, have driven them out in the midst of their gains, and for the time have spoiled their trade, is a proof that they were overawed by something in him, while their own consciences being guilty, they were the more easily affrighted when they were so attacked.

Here Christ performed some more of his kind miracles, and cured the blind and the lame. No wonder that the people cried out, "Hosanna, blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord!" When they saw such miracles, it was natural that they should cry, "Hosanna," or, "Save, I beseech," and that they should bless such a Saviour. And the little children joined in his praises. They were in the temple worshipping, we hope, and not playing—and their hearts were touched with love to Jesus, and their lips could not keep silence. It is sweet to hear children praising their Saviour, for then they seem almost to resemble angels, who are always praising him. And these children did not, as we hope, praise him merely in a thoughtless way, as they would have cried Huzza! but they saw how much there was in him to love, and so out of the abundance or fulness of their hearts, their mouth showed forth his praise. There is reason to believe that they were very sincere, for the chief priests and Scribes, who were wicked men, and hated Christ, "were sore displeased" to hear their devout expressions; and so our Lord reproved them, and said as much as that these good children were patterns of divine workmanship worthy of imitation: "Jesus saith unto them, Yea; have ye not read, Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings thou hast perfected praise?"

Returning in the morning to Jerusalem, having slept in the quiet village of Bethany, which was only two miles from the city, it is said "he hungered." Jesus hungered! Think on this; he who was the bread of life was himself hungered! Yes, dear young





reader, he took our nature to die for us; and though he was without sin, yet he endured the infirmities of our nature; he wept, he was fatigued, he was thirsty, and he hungered. Seeing a fig-tree growing in the way, he would have refreshed himself with a fig; but though it had plenty of fine leaves, it appears that it had no fruit, and he pronounced sentence upon the tree: "Let no fruit grow on thee henceforward for ever. And presently the fig-tree withered away." This was a sign by which he taught his disciples that the Jewish nation, which made such appearance of being as the garden of the Lord, were like nothing but the fig-tree which bore only leaves, and no fruit. And it teaches us also that mere show is not what Christ looks for, but he expects us to bear something good, if we profess to bring forth the fruits of holiness.



The disciples wondered when they saw the fig-tree so soon withered away at his word; and then he took occasion to tell them that if they had faith in God as firmly as they ought to have had it, they might do the same; but if they prayed without firmly believing in God's power to help them, their prayers would fall short of their desired success. True faith can do wonders: and if they would say to a mountain, Depart into the midst of the sea, it should depart. Not that they would have occasion to ask for such a thing as this: God will not do for us what can be of no benefit to us, but our Lord meant that difficulties, seemingly as great as the removal of a mountain, could and would be removed by the prayer of faith. What an encouragement this is to pray for all things that may be good and necessary for us! "Lord, teach us to pray!"

The chief priests could not let Christ alone, and as soon as he





had returned to the temple, and began to teach the people the way to heaven, they beset him, and wished to know who authorized him for his work. Now they might have easily seen by the miracles that he did, that he was divinely authorized, and if any doubt had been in their minds, and they had humbly asked him for information, he would have given it; but knowing the obstinate hatred and malice of their hearts, that they would not be convinced, he gave them no direct reply, but only put a question to them which obliged them to keep silence.

They, the chief priests, had bitterly hated John the Baptist, and therefore they could not praise him as a prophet; yet the people had a great respect for his memory, and would not allow him to be spoken against. So Christ asked them whether John's baptism was from heaven or of men? One of the two it must be. Now they felt that they could not say it was from heaven, for then Christ and the people could justly have reproached them for approving his death, when they acknowledged him to be sent of God to baptize; and yet if they said it was from men, they would equally expose themselves to difficulty, since the people believed otherwise, and would have been enraged against them. So they told a falsehood, and said, "We cannot tell." Then our Lord told them that as they would not answer his question, he would not answer theirs, and so he confounded them.

After this he instructed the people by interesting parables. The first of these is usually called "The Two Sons." You will see, in the twenty-eighth and following verses of this chapter, one of these sons was told by his father to go and work; but "he said, I will not; but he afterwards repented and went." Then he told the other to go: but he "said, I go; and went not." Now, said our Lord, which of these did as his father wished him? and "they say unto him," very rightly, "the first;" for, though he gave a very bad answer to his father, yet he became sorry for it, and went and did as his father told him: but the other, though he pretended to do what his father desired, never did it. By this he taught them the sin of pretending to works of righteousness, and not doing them. My dear young reader, there is nothing more important than sincerity in religion; for you see how often Jesus





reproves hypocrisy. How are our hearts affected? Are they sincere towards God? Let us pray—

“ Lord, search my heart, and try my reins,
And make my soul sincere ;
Then shall I stand before thy face,
And find acceptance there.”

Our Lord afterwards said, “ Hear another parable ;” and then spoke the parable of “ The Husbandmen.” It was to this purport : that a certain man planted a vineyard, with all its conveniences and defences —a wine-press, a vat, or large tub, into which to squeeze the juice of the grapes, for wine—and a hedge, to protect it from the intrusion of animals or passers by—and a tower, in which to sit for pleasure, and also to watch against the coming of robbers, which were common characters in that part of the world. “ And he let it out to husbandmen, and went into a far country.” As the rent was to be paid by giving a quantity of the fruit at the proper season, he sent his servants to receive it. But the husbandmen beat one, killed or beheaded another, and stoned another. He then sent other servants, but they ill-treated them in the same manner. At last he sent his son, supposing that they would not dare to ill-use him ; instead of which, they conspired to put him to death, and, indeed, they “ slew him.” Now, said our Lord, what should it be supposed that the lord of the vineyard would do with these wicked people, when, at last, he himself should come to reckon with them? Every one answered, “ He will miserably destroy those wicked men, and will let out his vineyard unto other husbandmen, which shall render him the fruits in their seasons.” Then he condemned them by their own sentence, and told them, “ The kingdom of heaven shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof.” By this he meant that the religious privileges which they enjoyed should be taken from them, and the blessings of his salvation should be made known to others, who would glorify him for those high favours which they so badly used.

But all this parable was to show how they had treated the servants of God whom he had sent to them ; for they had ill-used and killed his prophets, one after another, and in the end God





had sent himself, the Son of God, but they used him no better, and would at last conspire to put him to death.

We should have supposed that the priests and scribes would have felt ashamed when they found that the parable described their wickedness ; instead of which, they even then sought to lay hands on him, "but at the time they were afraid lest the multitude should take his part, as he was then high in favour with them."

There are two verses near the end of this chapter which I must just explain. In the forty-second verse, you read, "Jesus saith unto them, Did ye never read in the Scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner." This is a figure of speech, and refers to some words in the hundred and eighteenth Psalm. The Church of Christ—or, "the congregation of faithful men" of which it is formed—is compared to a building ; and as there is one stone which is of great importance to a building, and is called the chief corner-stone, because it supports the building, so Christ is the support of all his church, and the whole building rests upon him. But the Jewish builders—the Scribes, Pharisees, and Priests—would have had a church without him. They rejected Christ ; and so he was the stone which these builders refused but which was, nevertheless, the chief foundation which God laid in Zion, or his church, on which sinners, in every age of the world, must build their hopes of salvation.

Another text is, "Whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken : but, on whomsoever it shall fall it will grind him to powder." The Jews knew very well what our Lord referred to. They had two ways of stoning criminals ; the one was by throwing stones upon them, the other was by throwing them from a high place down upon stones ; and as in both cases the criminal died, so he intimated to the Jews, that, as the person falling on the stone does not hurt the stone, but only himself, so those who opposed him would be their own ruin, and, on whomsoever his power fell, it would be like the falling stone crushing the individual beneath its weight.





THE TWENTY-SECOND CHAPTER OF ST. MATTHEW.

The Parable of the Marriage Supper—Conversations of Christ with the Pharisees.

“And Jesus answered and spake unto them again by parables.”
Verse 1.

This chapter begins with another parable, and then relates some very interesting conversations of our Lord with his old, cunning, and bitter enemies—the Pharisees, Sadducees, and Scribes.

This parable is known by the name of “The Marriage Supper: or, the Great Supper.” It was usual with the Jews, and, indeed, still is usual among most nations, to make great feasts or entertainments at weddings. Our Lord tells of a king who made a marriage feast for his son. When the feast was ready, he sent his servants to call those that were invited; but they would not come. Then he sent other servants, but these they ill-used and slew, and so despised his kind invitation. Then the king “was wroth, and he sent forth his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and burned up their cities.” He then commanded his servants to go into the highways, and invite every one they could find, who might have the honour of partaking of the feast, instead of those who were first invited.

This parable had a like meaning with the last. The blessings of Christ's kingdom were offered to the Jews, but they rejected them, and ill-treated his servants, who invited them to feed on the bread of life. Their city Jerusalem would therefore be attacked by the Roman armies, and their city burned. The heathen nations, who were as the people on the highways, poor and wretched, without the knowledge of God, were then to learn about Jesus Christ, and when they should hear the glad news of salvation through him, declared by his faithful servants, they would accept of his invitation, and so hasten to the feast. I hope





you understand this. And I would have you to remember that you are now among those invited, and that the feast is still prepared for you. You are welcome to partake of it. The soul feeds here as the body might feed at the richest feast; and, believing in Jesus Christ, it enjoys infinitely more than the keenest appetite ever enjoyed in partaking of the perishing dainties which are provided at feasts to gratify the body.

The feast being all ready, the king entered, and he saw a person among the guests who was without a wedding garment. This I must explain to you. A great deal of the wealth of the people of the East consisted, and still consists, in fine clothes. When a great feast was given, these were provided for the use of the guests; and we may suppose that a king would, more especially, have a large quantity of splendid apparel in his wardrobe. Now



these persons, being suddenly invited from the highways, and many of them being of the poorest condition, would, more than others, need the use of such apparel to sit in the presence of the king. Besides, the neglect of wearing the robes provided by the king on all great occasions, is in the East considered as a great insult, and such a neglect has even cost some great men their lives.





The king is here, then, represented as going up to the guest, and inquiring how he obtained admittance, as he had not got on the proper garment, but had ventured to appear in his own dress, unfit for such an occasion. The man could say nothing; and the king ordered him to be bound hand and foot, and to be cast into a dark dungeon, which Eastern monarchs have always ready for persons who offend them. The happiness of heaven is called "the marriage supper of the Lamb," or of Christ, who is "the Lamb of God," because he was a sacrifice for sinners, like a lamb which used to be sacrificed for the people. Now, if we are not properly prepared for this supper, we can never be admitted to it. "Without holiness no man can see the Lord." Let us, then, see that we have on the wedding garment. Many things are necessary to salvation; and, as one says, "The wedding garment is that which is necessary to salvation, and whatever is necessary to salvation is the wedding garment."

We must now notice the conversations of our Lord with his adversaries. Mortified at his parables, the Pharisees took counsel together to try and catch him saying something that they might accuse him of speaking against the Roman emperor. The Jews had then a king, Herod; but he held his crown under the Roman emperor—the people having been so far conquered as to pay tribute to him. So the Pharisees took with them some of Herod's subtle courtiers, and asked Christ if it was lawful to pay tribute to Cæsar or not?—that is, whether, according to the law of Moses, they should pay tribute to a heathen? Now, if our Lord had said it was lawful, the people would have been enraged at him, for they did not like Cæsar, who was a Roman, taxing them, who were Jews; and, if he had said it was not lawful, they would have carried him before the Roman magistrates, and have had him put to death for teaching rebellion against Cæsar's authority. By such a subtle question, therefore, any other person would have been liable to be entrapped; but our divine Lord "perceived their wickedness, and said, Why tempt ye me, ye hypocrites? Show me the tribute money. And they brought unto him a penny. And he saith unto them, Whose is this image and superscription?" meaning, whose likeness was that stamped upon the penny, as our





queen's head is stamped upon ours, with her name and dignity around it. "They say unto him, Cæsar's. Then saith he unto them, Render therefore unto Cæsar the things which are Cæsar's, and unto God the things that are God's."

Now, they could not say that he had taught rebellion against Cæsar, for having his coin in circulation among them was a sign that they were subject to his authority; and so he hinted as much as that they were to give him his dues, while he left them to think what were the dues of Cæsar. And they could not say that he had set Cæsar above their divine law; for he told them they must at the same time give to God all that was due to him.

This prudence and wisdom confounded them, and they left him.

By and by the Sadducees came to him. This sect among the Jews denied the doctrine of the resurrection of the body at the last day; indeed, they denied even a future state, and supposed that when they died there was an end of them for ever. Now, they thought that they should perplex our Lord in teaching this doctrine, if they questioned him about a curious case that perhaps had, or at least, might happen. Seven brothers had had the same wife, the first brother dying, and then the second, on to the last; and so they married her one after the other, which they could do by the Jewish law. Then, said they, if the resurrection is to take place, what a curious difficulty she and they will be in, for whose wife is she then to be? Our Lord, in reply, told them that they were quite mistaken; that there was no marrying in heaven; and that all there were as angels—happy without the need of those domestic comforts which are wanted here. And, with respect to the resurrection, he referred to the language of their own Scriptures in such a way that they could not possibly contradict him—"Have ye not read that which was spoken unto you by God, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob?" This was the language of God to Moses, at the burning bush; and Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, were then all dead. Now, added Jesus, "God is not the God of the dead, but of the living;" if these were never to rise again, and their spirits were not still living, he could not be called their God. He would





not be the God of a mere rotten carcase. Therefore, God is not the God of the dead, who are not, but of the living, who now exist. Our Lord would give no direct answer on state matters when asked about Cæsar, for his kingdom was not of this world; but, when the Sadducees disputed a great truth, he directly declared it, for he came to bring "life and immortality to light," or to make them clear as the light of day, "by the gospel." The Sadducees supposed that when the body died the soul died with it; but Christ gave them to understand the very contrary—that the soul did not die, and that the body would live with it. The spirit lives, but the spirit is not a perfect man, and so there shall be a resurrection of the body to unite it to the spirit for ever.

The Sadducees had nothing to say, and the people were all surprised at the powerful teaching of Christ.

The Pharisees were much vexed to find that our Lord had so put the Sadducees to shame, for they thought that he would gain all the people over to him; and being jealous of his popularity, they resolved to try what further could be done to confound him. So they set their heads together, and got a clever lawyer of their body to attack him. But by a lawyer you must not understand one who practised the common law of the land, as our English lawyers do, but one who understood well the law of Moses, and was accustomed to be looked up to by the people to explain it. The question which the lawyer put to Christ was, "Which is the great commandment in the law?" The Jews were used to quibble and dispute about a number of trifling things, and there were many opinions among them on this question, and so the lawyer hoped that by obtaining an answer from Christ, he should set all those against him who held the opinions which he opposed. But our Lord did not hesitate one moment to reply, and he said that the great commandment was to love God with all the heart; and who could dispute this, that God has the first claims on the love of his creatures? However, as all the commandments are great, he added, "The second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself;" and what could they say against that being a great commandment, for if all men were to be guided by it, no one would ever do wrong to another? You know, indeed, that there





are ten commandments, but all the rest are to prevent our oppressing, or doing wrong to our neighbour, and so our Lord made here two great commandments. The question, however, was, which *one* was the great commandment, and his answer did not evade it, for the whole signified as much as this—That love to God is the great commandment; for love to our neighbour, if it be of the right sort, can only be exercised by him who truly loves God.

Christ now turned the tables, as we say, and on his part he began to question his adversaries; but they were equally defeated whether he answered or proposed the question. The question was, "What think ye of Christ? Whose son is he?" As Christ means *the Messiah*, whom they were expecting, the teachers of the people, and this skilful lawyer, ought to have been able to make some reply to his question; but what they said, was what any little child could have answered: "The son of David." Now every one who had learned the least about the Messiah, must have known that he was to spring out of the family of David. But on their answering this question, which they could not avoid, our Lord then added another, which rose out of it, and to which they found it difficult to reply: "He saith unto them, How then doth David in spirit call him Lord, saying, The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, till I make thine enemies thy footstool? If David then call him Lord, how is he his son?" The words quoted are in the one hundred and tenth Psalm. The Jews understood these words to describe the Messiah, and they understood rightly—though now they did not receive that Messiah when they saw him, notwithstanding that he worked so many miracles among them, which showed him to be a most extraordinary person. Now the Messiah was to spring from the line of David, and so he was his son after the flesh, though many generations in distance from him; yet David called him Lord. The great Jehovah is represented speaking to him, and telling him to sit upon his seat of dignity and power; and, in describing this, David, a prophet, speaking of what was to come to pass, said, "The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand." Now if he were David's son, said Christ, how could he be his Lord? Is a son lord over his father? Certainly not. The Pharisees were puzzled, for they





looked for some great *man* to come to be their Messiah, and did not see that the Messiah-Christ was to be not only man in his flesh, but also THE SON OF GOD, THE LORD—Him in whom dwelt all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. Since, therefore, they could not see this grand part of the description of the Messiah, they could not make out how David called his son Lord, and so could not answer Christ, and were put to shame and silence. They who truly know Christ, know him now to be David's son and David's Lord; the son of David as he was a man of his race, and yet the Son of God, and the "Lord of all"—reigning over all things, and the great Governor of his church. And on this account they own and adore him.

I have endeavoured to make this question, with its design and meaning, plain to you, and I hope I have been able to make you understand it; but it is not so easy to explain it as some things; for the apostle Paul himself calls our Saviour's incarnation, or dwelling in the flesh like us, a mystery, and says, "Great is the mystery of godliness. God was manifest in the flesh." I do, however, hope that by reading what I have said very seriously, you will see something of its important meaning; and if you do not, it is worth while to go over it from the beginning yet again.

After this no man durst ask Christ any more questions.

THE TWENTY-THIRD CHAPTER OF ST. MATTHEW.

Christ's Discourse respecting the Wickedness of the Pharisees.

"Then spake Jesus to the multitude, and to his disciples."—Ver. 1.

We have in this chapter a discourse of our Lord respecting the Pharisees. They having been put to shame, this is what he thought proper to say to the people about them, to warn them against their wicked conduct. In order to notice what is most necessary, we shall run over this chapter in a sort of short way, explaining the passages something like notes.





Verse the Second.—*The Scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat.* That is, now Moses is now no longer the teacher of the people, explaining God's law: these men take the place of Moses.

Verse the fourth.—*They bind heavy burdens, and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers.* Our Lord did not mean that the Pharisees put loads on the people's backs, as porters bear loads; but that, as porters are laden with great weights, so the Pharisees burdened the consciences of the people by commanding them to observe a great number of trifling things, which God had never commanded; and which, while they enforced them so much upon others, they took care not to do themselves. These burdens are, in Scripture, called traditions—they were rules of their own making, and were delivered from one race to another by word of mouth, but did not form any part of the written word of God.

Verse the fifth.—*But all their works they do to be seen of men; they make broad their phylacteries and enlarge the borders of their garments.* They were fond of making a show of religion, and did every thing before men, instead of secretly before God. They wore great phylacteries, or pieces of parchment on their foreheads, and on the wrists of their left arms, on which were written certain words of the divine law, to make the people believe how much they tried to remember it. And, as the Jews wore fringes on the edge of their garments, to distinguish them from the heathen nations round about, so they, to distinguish themselves from others of their own countrymen, wore broader fringes than others.

The next verses also tell us, that if these Pharisees went to a feast, they took the head of the table, to show that they were superior to others, and to attract attention; or, if they went into the markets they tried to engage the public notice of the people there, and to be addressed by a title which was thought very honourable, that is, "Rabbi, Rabbi," or, "My Master, my Master."

Verse the ninth.—*Call no man your father upon the earth.* Children may call their parents father, for they are to honour their father and their mother; but our Lord meant that no pompous title likely to make men proud was to be given to any man.





If, indeed, the ministers of Christ are instrumental in doing his work, and so are the parents of spiritual children, the apostle describes them as fathers, as may be seen in the fourth chapter of the First Epistle of the Corinthians,—but none, not even our own fathers, must domineer over us as fathers in religion. They may, and ought, to teach us how to reverence our Father which is in heaven, but they are not to rule over our consciences, that our consciences should obey them in religion, as a child in other things is bound to obey his father ; *for*, added our Lord, *one is your Father, which is in heaven*. In the same sense our Lord said, *One is your Master, even Christ*. We may be servants, and must then obey our masters, and Christ teaches us to do so ; but in religious matters, God only is our master, whom we are required to serve.

Verse the thirteenth—But woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites ! for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men : for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in. The word hypocrite means one that is like a stage-player, who acts the character of one person while he himself is another ; he, perhaps, struts on the stage as a king, when he has not even any title, rank, or money. So the Pharisees appeared in false characters, seeming to be very pious men, when they had no piety at all. See, as I have before told you, how Jesus hates the want of sincerity ; for he whose lips began to open on the Mount with pronouncing blessings on the poor in spirit—the mourners—the meek and others, here pronounced but woes against the hypocritical Pharisees. Oh, let us beware of insincerity before God ! “ Search me, O God, and try me, and know the ground of my heart ; and see if there be any evil way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting ! ” By woe, is here meant sorrow, misery, and a threatening of dreadful punishment for such great wickedness as hypocrisy. By the kingdom of heaven is meant—not heaven itself, for happily no man has power to shut another out of heaven—but what is called “ the Gospel dispensation,” or *the time of preaching the Gospel to perishing sinners* ; as I have before explained it to you. Now, by trying to prejudice the people against Christ—the Messiah who came into the world to open





the gates of this kingdom, and to preach the gospel to the meek—they did, as it were, shut the gates of this kingdom against them, and, not contented with refusing to enter in themselves, they both ruined themselves and others, by persuading them not to enter in.

Verse the fourteenth.—Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye devour widows' houses, and for a pretence make long prayers; therefore, ye shall receive the greater damnation. It is said by some writers, that the Pharisees, to seem very holy, prayed three times a day, and three hours at a time, so that they must have prayed nine hours a day. But they did not pray from the heart. They muttered over some words which they had got ready, without their souls going out towards God in what they said. They also made money by their prayers, and this was their object, which was a vile abuse of the design of prayer, which is to ask blessings of God for ourselves and others. And what was worse, under this pretence of praying, they devoured widows' houses, that is, they imposed upon poor widows, from whom they most likely got much of the money left to them for their support, by pretending to pray for them better than they could pray for themselves.

Now there is no harm in long prayers; for prayer is a good employment, if we have time to be long, without robbing our family of our needed work and services, in which case God never requires one duty to clash with another. We have, as good Mr. Henry remarks, many sins to confess, many mercies to ask, and many blessings to be thankful for,—so that we have enough to engage us at times long in prayer; and our blessed Lord, before he suffered, and when he needed extraordinary support of spirits, was engaged a whole night in prayer. But these Pharisees were condemned, as the same writer beautifully remarks, in a figure of speech, because, “while they seemed to soar heavenwards upon the wings of prayer, their eye, like the kite's, was all the while upon their prey on the earth—some widow's house or other, that lay convenient for them.”

Verse the fifteenth.—Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and





when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves. A proselyte is a person whom we bring over to believe and do what we believe and do. The Pharisees were very diligent in making proselytes; they did not mind any trouble, but were like the merchant, who travels by land or by water, if he can make his gain. Now the persons whom the Pharisees made proselytes were heathens, used to wicked practices not done by the Jews; but as the Pharisees only converted them to their own wicked ways, they did but make them more wicked, by adding wickedness to wickedness. This is what our Lord meant by making them twofold more the children of hell than themselves.

Verse sixteenth.—Woe unto you, ye blind guides, which say, whosoever shall swear by the temple it is nothing, but whosoever shall swear by the gold of the temple he is a debtor. People were accustomed to offer gifts of gold for the use of the temple, and sometimes to swear or make oath that they would give certain gifts. Now, if they made oath to do any thing, and merely said, "By the temple, or in the name of the temple, I will do it," the Pharisees said they might break their promise if they pleased; but if they swore in the name of the gold to be offered, they must not break their promise then. But our Lord said this was wicked, for one sacred promise should be kept as much as another; and if there was any difference in point of dignity, between the gold consecrated to the temple, and the temple itself, the temple was the most noble, and the promise made by it ought rather to be kept. But he who knows men's hearts saw that this was all hypocrisy, and that they recommended the keeping the oath by the gold, because they were sharers of it when it was cast into the treasury. Christ called these men blind guides, since they pretended to guide others in the way to heaven, and could not see it themselves.

Verse the twenty-third.—Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint, and anise, and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith. Mint, anise, and cummin, are herbs. The Pharisees were very particular in giving the priests and levites the tenth part of the value of every thing that made their income, even to these small herbs; and they did not lose by it, for the priests made





them due returns for setting this example. But they were unjust, unkind, and unfaithful to others; and so while they minded trifling things that cost them nothing and turned to their advantage, they neglected more weighty or important things.

Verse the twenty-fourth.—Ye blind guides, which strain at a gnat and swallow a camel. They even pretended that it was very wicked to swallow a gnat or a fly, and strained their liquor when they drank it, that it might be quite pure; and so it became a saying in reference to those who mind little things, and pay no attention to things of importance, they strain at a gnat—a small thing—and swallow a camel—a huge animal, or great thing.

Verse the twenty-fifth.—Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess. The Pharisees were very particular about washing their cups and pots, and would neither eat nor drink out of any thing till it was well washed; but their hearts were full of wickedness, getting money by unjust and wrong means.

Twenty-seventh verse.—Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones and of all uncleanness. The Jews washed their tombs with clean white lime, that persons might not go too near them and be polluted; so that they looked very fair outside, and the contrast of what they were within, having only dead bodies and bones. Hence our Lord describes the Pharisees, as only having a fair appearance, while the dispositions of their hearts were foul within—they were “full of hypocrisy and iniquity.”

The next woe which our Lord pronounces, is against the hypocrisy of these Pharisees, who built grand and beautiful tombs over the graves of the prophets and righteous men, whom their forefathers had persecuted, and blamed them for their bad conduct, while they acted even more wickedly, in persecuting Christ and those that followed him; and would act worse still, in persecuting and putting to death both CHRIST himself and his apostles.





THE TWENTY-FOURTH CHAPTER OF ST. MATTHEW.

Christ foretels the Destruction of Jerusalem.

“And Jesus went out and departed from the Temple: and his disciples came to him for to show him the building of the Temple.

“And Jesus said unto them, See ye not all these things? Verily I say unto you, There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down.”—Vers. 1, 2.

The temple of Jerusalem was a most splendid building, and king Herod had expended a great deal for its improvement, so that it was so grand that the Jews used to say, he who has not seen the building of Herod, has never seen a beautiful building.

The disciples one day, having taken particular notice of its fine marble columns and curious workmanship, pointed them out to Christ, that he might admire them too. Our Lord then told them, “There shall not be left here one stone upon another that shall not be thrown down;” which really took place not a very long time afterwards, though there was then no probability that so fine and firm a building would or could be so easily destroyed.

The disciples were then more curious to know when this wonderful destruction should happen. Our Lord did not satisfy their curiosity, but gave them warning how they might know when it was coming on; that there should first be false prophets arising, who should deceive the people; and so it was. Then there should be wars; and there were terrible wars for a long time between the Jews and the Romans, who then ruled over them, as between them and several other nations. There should also be “famine, pestilences, and earthquakes.” There should likewise be cruel persecutions and murders of the followers of Christ; and finally, the Gospel should be preached to all other nations as well as to the Jews.

This would be a dreadful time. The Jews must then expect





miseries never known before in the whole world. God was about to punish them for their many and great sins against him, but especially for the greatest of all sins, that of rejecting and hating Jesus Christ, the only Saviour. So dreadful would be the vengeance of the Roman armies when once Jerusalem should be besieged, that the moment there was an appearance of it, all Christians were advised to escape, and lose not a moment, but flee and hide themselves in secret places in the mountains. If they were walking to cool themselves on the tops of their Eastern houses, they must not even return to pack up any thing, but hasten down outside; if at work in the field, and their clothes lay at a distance, it would be unwise to risk delay by going after them; and unfortunate would the mother be, that then had to escape with the burden of a child at her bosom; or if the siege should happen in winter, miserable would it be for the poor creatures who had to hurry over bad roads and amidst swelling floods; or if on the Sabbath-day, when they were limited by the law to a short journey, it would hardly be possible to escape at all.

Then the sun should be darkened, the moon not give her light, the stars should fall, and the powers of heaven be shaken. I have told you before, in noticing the prophecies, that the prophets used figures or similitudes to express things which were to happen; and that kings, queens, and magistrates, are frequently represented by the sun, moon, and stars (*see Isaiah, chapter the first*). Our Lord is here prophesying, and so he speaks as a prophet. He does not mean that the sun, moon, and stars, will really undergo all these changes, but that the Jewish church and government would, and that its rulers, and church, and temple, would lose all their glory, as much as the sun loses his for awhile in an eclipse, or the moon hers on a dark night, and this as suddenly as the shooting stars fall from heaven. It is, however, thought that our divine Lord had, at the same time, an eye to the last great day of judgment, when all nature shall be shaken, and he shall come to punish the wicked for their wickedness.

Then Jesus spake a parable or comparison about the fig-tree, and told them, that these signs of the destruction of Jerusalem which he had given them, would be as sure guides as were the





leaves of the fig-tree, when they broke out, guides of the approach of the summer; just as budding gooseberry or currant-trees warn us of the approach of spring. But the exact time was a secret known only to God, though it would be sudden as the destruction of the world in the days of Noah.

The desolation should also be so great, that if but two were together, even one of these should perish while the other escaped, whether they were labouring in the field or grinding at the mill: "the one" should "be taken and the other left."

Hence he told them all to "watch," and be on the look-out for these signs, that they might be ready to escape.

To fix his warnings more strongly on the mind, he spake another of his instructive parables. He told them of a steward, who was entrusted by his master with the affairs of his household, and who, if he conducted himself well, his master would not fail to reward; but if, on coming to inquire about him, he found he had abused his power, and behaved improperly to his fellow servants, he would punish him severely, and cut him in pieces, as men were punished in the East. If we mind the word of God, though we ought so to do, yet he will even reward us for only doing what he has a right to command; but if we do not mind him, then we must abide by the dreadful consequences, which at last will be "weeping and gnashing of teeth."

A worse destruction than that of Jerusalem awaits this guilty world, which, with all its works, shall be burnt up. We know not when that hour shall come, but if we trust in Jesus Christ, and flee to that divine Saviour as the refuge for our souls, let it come whenever it may, we shall be sure to be safe. And death constantly attends us, and may carry off the youngest at any hour, without previous notice. We should therefore always be ready to die, which can only be by trusting our souls and committing them daily to the care of Jesus; so that what our Lord said to his disciples about what was coming on them, may also be a proper warning for us: "Therefore, be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not, the Son of man cometh."





THE TWENTY-FIFTH CHAPTER OF ST. MATTHEW.

*The Parable of the Ten Virgins—The Parable of the Talents —
The Day of Judgment.*

“Watch, therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh.”—Ver. 13.

This chapter is a continuation of the last, and refers to the same terrible event—the destruction of Jerusalem. But our divine Lord clearly glides from that awful subject, into the destruction of the world, and the day of judgment, which I have just noticed at the end of the last chapter.

I must get you to read the first thirteen verses of the chapter, or I shall have no pages to spare to explain much of the parable which they contain. It is usually called “The Parable of the Ten Virgins.” It refers to a custom among the Jews, and still practised among people in Eastern nations. When two persons are married, the bridegroom goes out at night to meet his wife. He has his friends with him and she has hers, called here “ten virgins,” or young unmarried women. Torches and lamps are always carried in these processions. Our Lord represents five of the virgins as foolishly forgetting to take any oil with them. When, therefore, the party were all in a bustle to trim their lamps and light those which had gone out, while they had fallen asleep—and to go to meet the bridegroom on his arrival at the house of her father, where the bride was—they had no time to buy or get oil elsewhere, and asked the other virgins to supply them. But, as the others had only oil enough for themselves, they could not spare any to their foolish companions. So the foolish virgins had to leave the company to get oil; but, before they could get back, the procession was gone, the party had entered the bridegroom’s house, and, agreeably to their custom, the door was shut, and no further admittance given to any.



THE PARABLE
OF THE TEN VIRGINS.
MAT. XXV.



THE PARABLE OF THE TALENTS.

MATT. XXV.





By this our Lord teaches us, that, if we are not prepared with grace or holiness in our hearts when Christ comes to judgment, we shall be able to get none after; and, as the foolish virgins were shut out of the bridegroom's chamber, so must we in such a case be shut out of heaven.

Perhaps we may die to-morrow. Have we oil in our vessels? Are our hearts prepared to meet Christ? "Watch, therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh."

There is also another parable, which is known by the name of "The Parable of the Talents." You must read that first, too, and then I will explain it.

The design of Christ in this parable, is to teach us all to use our time, and abilities, and money, and whatever we have, diligently, in the best way we can, to promote his glory. These are our talents, intrusted to us to use properly. Talents, you know, were sums of gold and silver; a golden talent was worth thirty-five thousand dollars, and a silver one twenty-two hundred and fifty dollars; but some of our talents are of much more value than gold and silver, and must be answered for by even the poorest amongst us. If we diligently use our talents, though we may not all be able to use them to the same advantage as others, yet our gracious Lord will approve of what we have done, and say to our hearts now, and yet more hereafter, "Well done, good and faithful servants." But, if we take and hide our talents, as if they were buried in the earth, and so do no good to any, nor produce any glory to Him who gave them to us, then we shall be like the foolish, idle, and wicked servant here mentioned, and perhaps God may take these talents from us even now, but he will certainly at last, cast us away with the unprofitable.

The last thing in this chapter is a grand description of the day of judgment. Passing from the destruction of Jerusalem to that of our sinful world, our blessed Lord describes himself as about to come in all his glory, attended by all his angels, and seated on his judgment throne. All nations, of all times, shall be raised from the dead, and appear before him; and then he shall make one grand division between them, and separate forever the righteous from the wicked, just as a shepherd would divide his sheep from the goats.





Sheep and goats are not, indeed, generally seen together amongst



us; we have **but** few goats, but in some countries abroad, especially about the hilly countries in Greece, there are flocks of both sorts of animals feeding together. Now, the righteous are often called in Scripture by the name of sheep, because they are thought to be good emblems of innocent, harmless, and pure persons, while goats, from various causes, are emblems of the opposite characters.

Having separated the two, the great and heart-searching Judge, will place the righteous at his right hand, which is considered as the place of honor, and the wicked at his left hand, as a sign of their dishonour; or, to speak in other words, he will mark the righteous with his approval, and the wicked with disgrace and shame. He will then invite the righteous, and say to them, "Come, ye blessed"—and introduce them to his heavenly kingdom; while to the wicked he will say, "Depart from me, ye cursed!" He will even notice and reward the acts of kindness done to those who love him, as if done to himself, and will say, "Inasmuch as ye have done it to one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me." While neglect, unkindness, and cruelty, shown towards those who love him, will equally be marked and punished; for he will say to the guilty, "Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me." "And these shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal."

Oh, how awful will be the separation of that great day! Miserable souls! that shall be for ever parted from all the good and happy, and from God the giver of all good; and not only parted for ever from these, but plunged into hell with the devil





and wicked spirits, whence there will be no hope of ever escaping! Dear young reader, put your trust in Jesus, and he will save you from "the wrath to come."

THE TWENTY-SIXTH CHAPTER OF ST. MATTHEW.

The Passover—The Sufferings of Christ.

"The Son of man is betrayed to be crucified."—Ver. 2.

When our blessed Jesus came into the world to save sinners, he knew what he had to suffer. He was to die that we might live. And now the time of his death began rapidly to approach; and he told his disciples that in two days the passover was to be eaten, in remembrance of the eating of the lamb at the escape of the children of Israel out of Egypt, and that then he was to be betrayed that he might be crucified. Nothing could more firmly establish their faith in him than to see that he knew all things, and the exact time when they should come to pass. So if they should be disappointed at his death, and for a moment think it strange that he, who could have saved himself, should give himself up into the hands of wicked men who should crucify him,—yet when they afterwards thought on what he told them, it would only confirm their minds in their belief in him as the Son of God.

The disciples soon found that it was but too true they must lose their beloved Lord and Master. For "the chief priests, Scribes, and elders of the people," who had so often shown their hatred to Jesus, because he exposed their wickedness to the people, and reproved them for their hypocrisy and other crimes, now assembled together in the palace of the High Priest, called Caiaphas, and consulted that they might take Jesus by subtilty and kill him. They, however, did not like to venture to do so just at the passover, for they feared lest there should be "an uproar among the people." The people had received great benefits from





Jesus; many of them and their friends, who would travel from all parts of Judea to the feast, had been cured of their diseases by his kindness, and had seen the miracles which he had done, and it was, therefore, natural to suppose that if they had any gratitude about them, they would avenge any insults offered to him.

A few days before the passover, Jesus came to Bethany, a village near Jerusalem, and was invited to eat at the house of Simon the leper;—very likely one who had been a leper, and whom he had cured, and so he showed him this gratitude for his kindness. At all events he entertained Christ, and it is here related to his honour.

While Jesus was eating, a woman approached him, and poured some precious ointment on his head, which she had brought in an alabaster box. According to our customs, this would seem very rude, and particularly free behaviour in a female. But it was different in the Jewish country, and was a mark of very high respect, the ointment being expensive, and the fragrant smell proceeding from it most grateful to all present. Some of the disciples thought the woman was extravagant; but Christ knew her motive in what she did, and commended her love. Who she was is not exactly certain, as some suppose she was Mary Magdalene, out of whom Christ had cast seven devils, and others that she was Mary the sister of Martha and Lazarus. The fame of her kind act—her liberal token of love to Jesus—was, however, well known and spread abroad at that time; and, wherever the gospel was preached this was mentioned to her praise.

And now the moment arrived when the sufferings of our gracious Saviour began. One of his disciples, Judas, the wretched man! went to the chief priests and offered to deliver up Christ to them for thirty pieces of silver—the paltry price paid for a purchased servant,—about eighteen and three-fourths dollars! They durst not take Christ publicly for fear of the people, but Judas offered to take them to one of his private retreats, and there to deliver him up; and with the greatest care, he watched for the most favourable opportunity.

There were seven days in which the Jews ate their unleavened bread,—or bread not made of yeast or any thing to ferment it,





and during this time the passover was celebrated. You remember that the reason of eating this bread, was to keep the Jews in mind, that they were delivered from Egyptian bondage in the greatest haste, so that they had not even time to mix the leaven with their dough ready made in their troughs.

Jesus sat, or more properly, leaned, or laid down at the passover, with his disciples. The first passover was eaten standing, as another additional sign of the haste in which the people were to escape, but this sign was afterwards not used, and now they lay down, leaning on their elbows, just as we do on a sofa, this being the fashion in the Jews' country, and is still so in that part of the world. While our blessed Saviour took the passover, he said to his disciples, "One of you shall betray me." So that he showed that he knew what wickedness was in the heart of Judas, and, that he could have escaped from his treachery if he pleased; but he came into the world to give his precious life a ransom for sinners.

If he had not died, then no sinner could have been saved. For, your common sense will tell you, that a perfect being must be holy and just, as well as good; and, therefore, while God's goodness inclined him to save the sinner, God's holiness and justice required him to punish transgression. Now, if he had punished sinners as they deserved, they must have been punished for ever, and so could never be saved. But when Jesus came to save sinners, he "had power to lay down his life, and power to take it up again;" and so, having offered himself to die for, or instead of, sinners, and, having merit enough to atone or answer for all their sins, when he had died he rose again, and now his risen body shows that he was wounded and crucified for us who believe in him, and so we are freed from all condemnation.

This was the reason why Jesus did not escape from Judas; he knew that Judas would betray him, and told him so; and thus proved that he was more than man, because he could tell what was in the heart of man; but he loved us and resolved to die for us. Oh, let us then love him! can we do less in return for such love?

His disciples were very sorrowful, and all were afraid lest they should be tempted to do so wicked a thing as to betray their be-





loved Lord ; and they asked with great concern, " Lord, is it I ? " Then he said to them, " He that dippeth his hand with me in the dish, the same shall betray me. " They would *all* do this, for this was the way of eating, taking it out of one dish with their fingers, and not with knives and forks as we eat ; but then this was to show how villanous the man would be ; for to eat together was the greatest sign of friendship, and so this showed his conduct to be as bad as it possibly could be. Yet Judas, in order to disguise himself before the other disciples, daringly asked, " Master, is it I ? " and Christ said it was he.

Jesus then took bread and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, as is now done, after his example, at the Lord's supper ; and in like manner he took the cup. When he gave the bread, he said, " This is my body "—meaning this *represents* my body to be broken for you,—it could not actually be his body, for his body remained the same. So, also, he said, when he took the cup, " This is my blood of the *New Testament* "—that is, this represents my blood to be shed for sinners, and represents it by a different sign from that which has been used ; hitherto the blood of beasts was shed as the sign that he was to die, but now and henceforth wine, the blood or juice of the grape, was to be the sign. Both of these—the bread and the wine—were to be taken, and afterwards to be continued in the church, and received by Christians in remembrance that Christ died for them—" for the remission of sins," that is, the pardoning of sins.

It was now evening, and supposed, from the time of year, to have been moonlight. Jesus proposed to take a cooling walk to the mount of Olives, near Jerusalem, and at a place called *Gethsemane*, that is, an *olive-mill*, a place to press the *sweet oil* out of olives, such as we use in our salads—at this place he desired his disciples to sit down, while he retired to pray. He took, however, Peter, and " the two sons of Zebedee,"—that is, James and John, that they might see and bear witness of what he endured to save sinners.

Then he told them that his soul was " exceedingly sorrowful. " You, dear young reader, have perhaps felt great pangs before God for sin, and you know something of what it is for the soul to be



JESUS IN THE GARDEN OF GETISEMANE.



JUDAS BETRAYING WITH A KISS.



THE CROWN OF THORNS.



sorrowful—such pangs are dreadful, very dreadful indeed—it is, however, better to be sorrowful now, and heart-broken for sin, than to be lost for ever; but what must the sufferings of Jesus



have been when he was exceeding sorrowful, standing in the place of all his people, bearing their guilt, and feeling their sorrows; for so he did when he suffered. I have, however, only said, *perhaps*, you have felt *severe* sorrow, and where it is felt it is dreadful, and may well serve to give us an idea of the pains of Jesus bearing our sins and carrying our sorrows; but I must add, that we may be sorry for our sins, and show our sorrow by turning from them, and asking forgiveness for them, and hating them, without always feeling *the same agonies of mind* as some others. We must, however, all feel sorry for sin, and shall feel the more so, as we think on what Jesus suffered for our sins when he was “*exceeding sorrowful*.”

And now the dear Saviour began to feel *that* human nature which he had taken, shrink from the tortures which he knew it





must endure, and he prayed that "the cup might pass from him,"—that he might not suffer. He, however, only prayed in submission to the will of his Father. His human will would fain have escaped the suffering, but *that* must yield to his divine will, in which all was determined for the salvation of guilty men; and so he said, "Not as I will," in the form of weak man, "but as thou wilt," that God may be glorified and sinners be saved.

In this prayer we are taught to pray for the removal of any suffering only if God pleases; his wisdom and goodness will order all for the best, and we ought to submit to him.

Our Lord's disciples were wearied, and fell asleep; but he continued to pray, and again and again repeated the same affecting prayer.

Judas had not been with the party, he was absent, and Jesus knew why. He awoke his disciples and said, "Rise, let us be going: behold, he is at hand that doth betray me. And while he yet spake, lo, Judas, one of the twelve, came, and with him a great multitude with swords and staves, from the chief priests and elders of the people." They did not exactly know which was Jesus, and so Judas said he would go up to him and salute him, and then they would know. How strangely hardened his heart must have been, and how blinded, after Jesus had told him he was about to be betrayed, and that he would be the betrayer, to suppose that our Lord should not see through his hypocritical design, in kissing him only to betray him! And a worse sign he could not have given, for it only served to show his baseness in the strongest light. Had he struck him it would have been very bad, but to kiss him only to show his enemies which was he, was the height of wickedness! Those who now pretend to love Christ, and yet do not faithfully give themselves up to his cause, do but too much resemble Judas: this is like kissing Christ and betraying him.

Moreover, Judas added, "Hail, Master!" that is, peace be to thee, or health and happiness, as we say, "and kissed him." And all this he did from the love of money. Let us beware that that does not take possession of our hearts; for if we grasp after wealth, and are more concerned for that than for the cause of Christ, our covetousness will be our ruin. You have not money yet to tempt





you to this evil, but you may remember what I say, if God should ever allow you to possess it. Oh, do not forget, that the love of it made Judas even sell his Master.

The poor disciples showed too, that while Jesus was so ready to die for them, they were then afraid to lose their lives for him; they all "forsook him and fled!" So have many forsaken Christ, and followed no more after him, but given up their religion, and lost their souls, in a time of danger and persecution. These disciples, however, though frightened now, were yet sincere, and afterwards suffered and died for love to the memory of their divine Master.

Peter was always very zealous and forward in danger, and when Christ was taken, he did not quite like to leave him in the hands of his enemies without seeing what they were about to do, so he "followed him afar off unto the High Priest's palace, and went in, and sat with the servants, to see the end."

In the meantime the priests and elders tried to get some persons to bear witness that Christ had said something in their hearing that was very wicked, and according to their law deserved death. Now none could say this in truth; so they were obliged to get false witnesses; that is, pay some bad men to say anything they pleased, to make a reason for pronouncing sentence on him. These vile men then declared that they had heard Christ say, that he could destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days. Christ had, indeed, said something like such a thing, but he spake only of "the temple of his body;" that is, that when he should be put to death he would "rise again the third day." And he did not say, "I am able to destroy the temple," but only, "destroy this temple," meaning, as I have just said, his body. This was, however, too trifling to affect his life; so the High Priest tried if he could get Christ to say something that would suit their purpose better, and adjured him to tell them whether or not he was "the Son of God." "Thou hast said," said Jesus; that is, thou art right—"I am the Son of God." Then the High Priest rent his clothes, declared he had spoken blasphemy, and that there was no further need of witnesses. Had he not been the Son of God, he would, indeed, have spoken blasphemy; but they did not





know that he was so, though he had done miracles enough in the land to prove it, and, therefore, they now seized the opportunity of putting to death the Lord of Life and Glory.

And now the servants and soldiers spit in his face, struck him, slapped his cheeks, and having blindfolded him, asked him to tell them who did it. This was horribly wicked; and they are as horribly wicked who make sport with the name of Jesus, and use it triflingly or in jest: take care never to sport with sacred things.

Peter was all this while sitting among the servants of the High Priest, when one of the maids espied him out, and accused him of being a disciple; but Peter was afraid of suffering in the same way, and so denied it. He then left his seat and went to the porch or entrance of the High Priest's hall; but there he was again discovered by another maid, and then he swore that he knew nothing of Christ. After this some more persons charged him with being one of Christ's followers, and they said that his dialect proved he came from the same part of the country. Peter again cursed and swore, probably worse than before, and said he knew nothing of Christ. Those that curse and swear show most plainly that they cannot belong to Christ, so Peter took a most effectual and wicked method to disguise himself.

Jesus had warned him of this, and told him, that before the cock should crow twice he would deny him thrice. His words now came to pass. The cock crew—Peter remembered it—his heart was ready to break—he thought how wicked he had been, and, going away, he “wept bitterly.” This was a sign that he sincerely repented; but no weeping bitterly can ever wash away the foulness of your sins and of mine; *that* can only be done by faith in the blood of Jesus Christ, which has a particular virtue in healing the wounded soul, and taking away its guilt and defilement, and which “cleanseth from all sin.”





THE TWENTY-SEVENTH CHAPTER OF ST. MATTHEW.

Sufferings of Christ—His Death.

“Jesus, when he had cried again with a loud voice, yielded up the ghost.”—Ver. 50.

Good Mr. Henry, whose name is now well known to you, since I have so often mentioned him, says, “It is a very affecting story which is recorded in this chapter, concerning the sufferings and death of our Lord Jesus. Considering the thing itself, there cannot be a more tragical story told us ; common humanity would melt the heart to find an innocent and excellent person thus misused. But, considering the design and fruit of Christ’s sufferings, it is gospel, it is good news, that Jesus Christ was thus delivered for our offences ; and there is nothing we have more reason to glory in than the cross of Christ.”

I hope you now understand what he means in these words ; that though Christ’s sufferings were such as ought to move our hearts even to grief as well as pity, yet they ought, at the same time, to be gloried in, because they have produced our salvation as much as the tree produces its fruits.

We left Christ in the hands of the chief priests and elders, condemned to die, but they had not full power to kill him ; they could only show how much they desired to put him to death. About two years before this, the Romans, who had conquered the Jews, had taken from them the power to execute any, and therefore another council was held, to know what further to do. So they bound Jesus and led him to Pilate, the Roman Governor, who was placed over them, in order that he might execute the sentence which they had passed upon him.

While this was doing, Judas’s conscience became so troubled, for having basely delivered up his innocent Master, that he went and threw down the money which, for his wicked act, he had received from the chief priests and elders, and he said, “I have

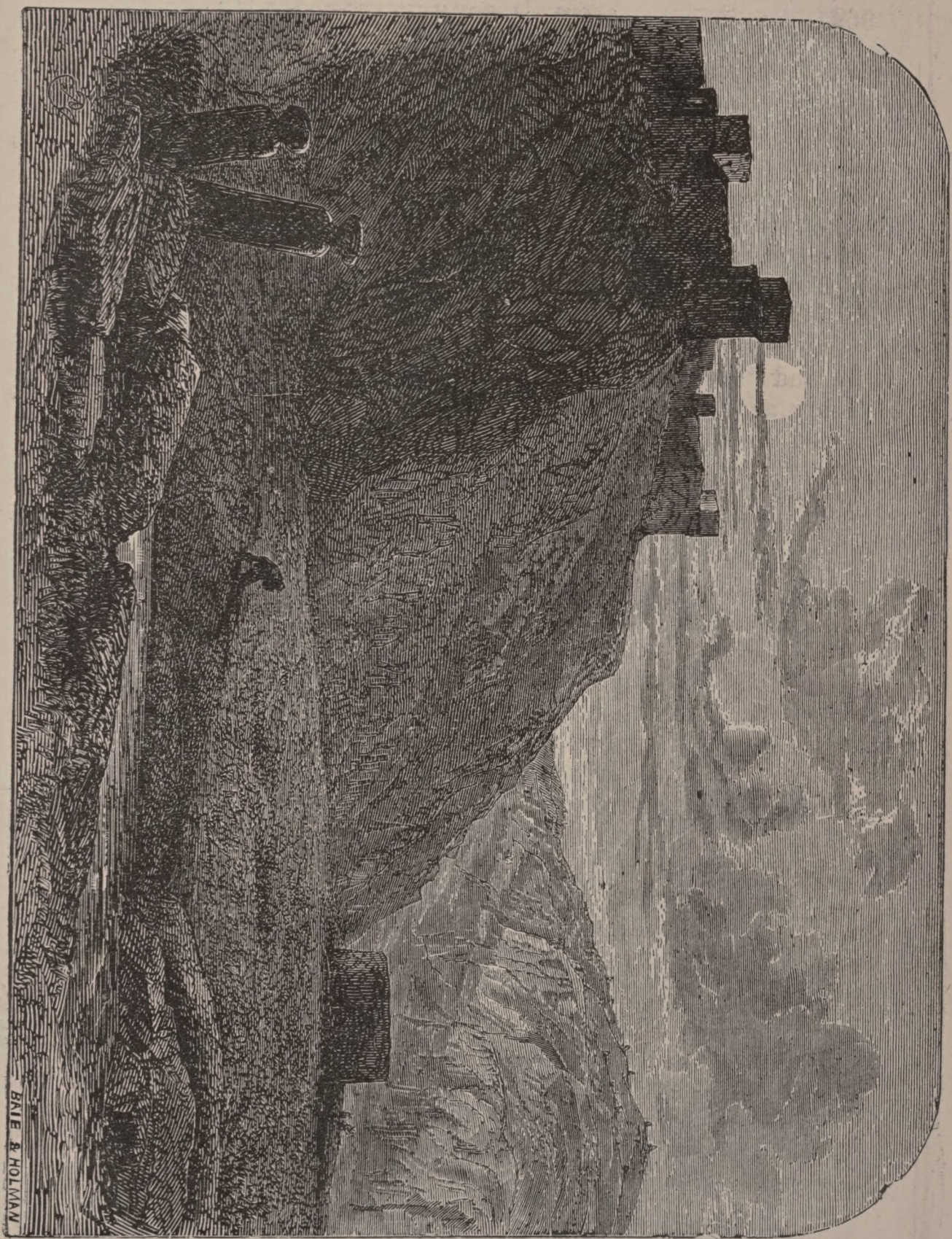




sinned, in that I have betrayed the innocent blood." But the priests, even more hardened than he, said, "What is that to us? see thou to that." As much as to say, "that is your concern, Judas, and not ours; our end is served, and so you may do as you please; and if you have betrayed the innocent, the fault is yours, and not ours." How the hearts of these wicked men deceived them, as if they had it not in their power to release Christ, when such a witness told them of his innocence; and as if, because he had betrayed his Master, they were not at all guilty in following up his wickedness by seeking his life! Judas, in despair, left the temple, and "went and hanged himself." "See," says our good Mr. Henry again, "what a drug money is when the guilt of sin is attached to it." All money, wrongly obtained, will, sooner or later, burn the conscience, remember that. The priests would not use the money for sacred purposes,—so very scrupulous could they be in some things, and yet so wicked in others—and so they bought with it a field, called the Potter's Field, for the purpose of burying strangers in it.

Christ having declared himself to be the Christ or Messiah—the Son of God—the Jews thought they had excellent grounds on which to accuse him to the Romans. They had a notion in their heads, that the Messiah was to be their king, as David and others had been before, and so they thought that by Christ owning himself to be the Messiah, he professed also to be their king. This was their own fancy, for his kingdom was not of this world, but spiritual; he never intended to sit upon an earthly throne, but to reign in the human heart, making it obedient to him from love. This fancy of theirs they told to Pilate as truth; and as the Romans would be jealous of any one claiming the throne—as Herod was when Christ was born—they thought they could bring a charge of treason against Christ. Pilate being informed of this, asked, "Art thou the king of the Jews?" Jesus said unto him, "Thou sayest;" meaning, "I am." He was, indeed, as I have said, a spiritual King, reigning in the hearts of those that believed in him; but he was misunderstood, and he would explain no further; for he knew that the malice of the Jews bent them on his destruction. And this was not the only charge they had, for they pro





CHRIST BEARING HIS CROSS.



THE CRUCIFIXION.





ceeded to accuse him of many other things, in reply to which charges, he thought it beneath the dignity of innocence to reply.

Now there had been a custom introduced by the Romans—perhaps to win the hearts of the lower orders of the Jews—to release some prisoner at the time of the passover. So Pilate fixed upon Barabbas, a most notorious thief and murderer, and proposed to the Jews to determine which of the two should be set at liberty, Barabbas or Christ. He believed Christ to be innocent, and proposed this Barabbas, whose life none could well wish to be spared, that the innocent Saviour, whom he set in contrast to him, might escape. But the chief priests and elders managed to persuade the people to demand Barabbas. Astonished at their choice, Pilate then asked what was to be done with Jesus, and they said, “Let him be crucified!”

Crucifixion was a cruel, lingering, and disgraceful punishment. Cruel, for the criminal had to bear his cross to the place of execution, and then, faint and weary, and heart-broken, he was stretched upon the wood, which was something like the letter T. On the top part, his arms were extended and his hands nailed to it; and on the upright part his body was to hang, supported in part by his nailed hands, and, before raising, his feet were nailed to the lower part. The cross was then lifted up, and, with a jerk, it was thrust into a hole in the ground, thus adding to the poor victim's sufferings. The criminal sometimes lingered a long time before he expired, and was killed at last. This mode of putting to death was only practised on wicked servants, thieves, robbers, and murderers, and the vilest of men; and it showed, indeed, the bitter and horrid malice of the wicked Jews against the innocent Saviour, that they wished him to suffer no less a punishment; and they thought that this would frighten all his followers, as well as make them ashamed of him.

Pilate was shocked at the Jews, yet he had not courage nor uprightness enough to refuse them their wicked request; so to quiet his own conscience in giving up the innocent Saviour to be put to death, he took some water and washed his hands before all the people, which was a custom to show that a man took no part in the murder of any person; and he said, “I am innocent of the





blood of this just person, see ye to it." Then answered all the people and said, "His blood be on us and on our children;" that is, "we will bear the blame, whatever may happen from it, so let him die: we care nothing for the consequences, we are not afraid of them."

Oh miserable people! His blood was afterwards upon them indeed! Nearly their whole nation were butchered, enslaved, driven into perpetual banishment, and scattered among all nations, as they are to this day: and the Romans, whom they used as the tools to do their wicked deed, were the men that afterwards executed the Divine vengeance. "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." Oh, dear young reader, fear to sin against him, for "our God is a consuming fire!" He is, indeed, merciful; but those who reject and despise Jesus, will find that they have nothing to look for but his "fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries."

Jesus was scourged; stripped; dressed in mockery, in a scarlet robe, like a pretended king; a crown of thorns was made and put upon his head, that his tender temples might be pierced and made to bleed: and a reed, or cane, was put in his hand as a sham sceptre. All of this the Saviour submitted to with the greatest meekness. Then, to finish their mockery, the soldiers bowed the knee to him, and cried, "Hail, king of the Jews!" Next they spit upon him, out of contempt, and smote him on the head with the reed, and, when they had heaped upon him every indignity, they took off his mock robes, and led him away to be crucified.

On their way to the place of execution, they met with a man of Cyrene, named Simon, thought by some to have been attached to Christ; and as they feared that our blessed Lord could hardly be able to live any longer if he bore his cross, having already suffered so much, they made Simon carry the cross.

At length they came to a spot called Golgotha, and there "they gave him vinegar to drink mingled with gall; and when he had tasted thereof he would not drink." Nothing is more cruel than to mock one that is thirsty; what then must his sufferings have been when so mocked after enduring so many tortures and insults! Compassionate people usually mixed a drink to cheer the spirits





of the victims going to execution, and to stupefy them in their griefs ; but none offered to compassionate the blessed Jesus, but only to add misery to misery. Vinegar would have quenched his thirst, but gall mixed with vinegar was a nauseous draught indeed !

And now he was stripped naked, and his garments were parted by lots among the soldiers who were engaged in his execution ; and, being crucified, the soldiers sat down to watch him, lest any of his disciples should take him down before he was dead.

It was usual to write the offender's accusation, and to have it carried before him to the place of execution ; but Christ's was written on his cross, "THIS IS JESUS, THE KING OF THE JEWS."

Two thieves were at the same time crucified with him, "one on the right hand, and another on the left."

As the cross was placed by the road side, the mob from Jerusalem that passed by it, wagged their heads in derision at Jesus, and reviled or blasphemed him, and told him that if he was the Son of God, he ought to show it, by coming down from the cross ! He was, indeed, soon to show that he was the Son of God, but it would be in another way, after their malice was satisfied, by rising from his tomb. The chief priests and scribes also united in mocking him, and said, if he would come down from the cross they would believe him. This was not true ; they knew that he had raised the dead, and yet they would not believe him ; and now they had filled up the measure of their iniquity, and must bear their guilt. The crucified thieves also mocked him.

At noon-day, called by the Jews "the sixth hour," there came on a darkness, which lasted for three hours, and spread over all the land. And at the ninth hour, or "three o'clock in the afternoon," Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" and so his human nature sunk upon the cross. Some thought he cried out from being so thirsty, and handed him some vinegar in a sponge put upon a reed ; and now Jesus cried with a loud voice, and gave up the ghost, or yielded up his spirit.

Oh, what were his sufferings ! His bodily sufferings were indeed great, but these were nothing compared with those of his





soul. For God to forsake him at that moment, how awful! But why did God forsake him? God hates sin. The innocent Jesus then bore our sins. This was the reason why he yielded to death. The Jews were wicked in killing him, and did it all of their own accord and out of the malice of their own hearts; but they could not have killed Christ if he had not willingly given himself to their malice and cruelty. And this, that in his death, he might bear the sins of all his people, for he himself was innocent—and it was these sins that caused God to withhold his comforts from him. Well may we adore the blessed Jesus for such a display of love. But, if he cried out beneath the weight of man's guilt, what must those sinners endure, who will not believe in him and be saved, and so doom themselves to bear the weight of their own guilt for ever?

But, besides the great darkness, the veil of the temple was rent from top to bottom, the earth quaked, and even the rocks were split asunder. The thick tapestry veil was rent, as a sign that all that was sacred in the ceremonies of the law was now over, and those ceremonies of no use; for the great Saviour and sacrifice whom all signified, was now come, and had finished his work for guilty men. The earth quaked, perhaps as a sign of the dreadful shaking which was soon to befall the whole Jewish nation; and the rocks were split asunder, to shame the hearts of the people, more hardened than those rocks.

These things convinced the soldiers who watched Jesus, and the centurion who commanded them, that he was no common person; and they were struck with fear, and said, "Truly this was the Son of God."

Many women also, who followed him from Galilee, were witnesses of his crucifixion; among whom "was Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James and Joses, and the mother of Zebedee's children."

On the second evening, when the Jewish Sabbath was about to begin, the body of Jesus was obliged to be removed; and Joseph of Arimathea, a rich man, and secretly attached to Christ, went to Pilate, and begged his body, which could not be taken down and buried, without permission being given by the Roman gov





error. Leave being granted, "he wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn out in the rock"—for the sepulchres of the Jews were made in rocks;—"and he rolled a great stone to the door of the sepulchre, and departed."

The day following, the chief priests and Pharisees went to Pilate, and, fearing lest the disciples should steal the body of Christ and say it was risen, they begged that they might have the tomb guarded. So they made all as sure as they could, and sealed the stone that nobody might remove it, and set a watch or guard of soldiers to prevent any one approaching. This was one of the happiest events that could have taken place, because it furnished in the end the surest proofs that Jesus was not stolen away, but that he arose from the grave.

THE TWENTY-EIGHTH CHAPTER OF ST. MATTHEW.

The Resurrection of Christ.

"He is risen, as he said."—Verse 6.

It is reckoned that Christ lay in the tomb thirty-six or thirty-eight hours. At the dawn of day, on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene, and Mary, the wife of Cleophas, went to the sepulchre, still lingering over the dear remains of their beloved Lord. "And, behold, there was a great earthquake: for the Angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it. His countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow: and for fear of him the keepers did shake, and became as dead men." These keepers were Roman soldiers, the most courageous men in the world; but they were frightened at the scene. If the resurrection of Christ was so awful, what must his coming to judgment be! How will the guilty quake then!





When the women approached the sepulchre, the Angel spoke kindly to them, and told them that the Lord was risen, and desired them to tell the glad news to the disciples, who were greatly discouraged at his crucifixion and death, and they were to assure them he would soon meet them in Galilee.

The women ran with all speed to tell the disciples, but on their way Jesus himself met them and saluted them; and they fell at his feet, and held them, and worshipped him: and he repeated the orders to go into Galilee.

But what did the Roman soldiers do? They were set to guard the body of Jesus, and yet he had escaped. How could they escape punishment for this? They went into the city and told the simple story how it happened, and how terrified they were. "They showed unto the chief priests all the things that were done;" how that there had been a very great earthquake, and a very surprising appearance; for one like a young man descended from the clouds, whose countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow, which filled them with astonishment and dread; that he rolled away the stone from the sepulchre, and then sat upon it; and that some women, coming to the sepulchre, were shown by him where the body had been laid, but was now gone; and how, that after they had recovered themselves from the fright, they had themselves examined the sepulchre, and the body was certainly gone; and sure they were that the women did not carry it away, nor any others; all which they thought proper to relate to the chief priests; partly on their own account, to clear themselves from the charge of bribery and corruption, and sloth and negligence; and partly that the chief priests might consider what further was proper to be done.

Now it would not do to bring the guards to trial for letting Jesus escape, for they would have defended themselves by telling the truth, and only have spread the account of the resurrection more abroad. So it was settled that a story should be made up, that the disciples came by night and stole the body away while the guards slept; and the elders gave the soldiers a large reward to keep the resurrection secret. But this story, after all, was a very poor one; for it was not very likely that the timid disciples,





who all forsook Christ and fled, would have stolen his body from the Roman soldiers; nor that all the guards would have been asleep; and even if they had, it was more than probable that some would have roused up, and the disciples would then have endured their vengeance. And then, it was very strange that the Roman soldiers should have been saved from punishment, after they had slept upon their watch, which, by their laws, was deemed a heavy crime: but it was settled that the Jewish elders should explain the matter to the Roman governor if the affair came under his notice, and that so the soldiers should not be injured. The bungling nature of the story shows that the soldiers told a lie, and that they could not prevent the resurrection of our blessed Saviour, though they were even set to watch his tomb. Their story, reported by the Jews even to this day, is a delightful encouragement to our belief that Jesus Christ arose from the dead on the third day, but not the only proof we possess; for the eleven disciples went into Galilee, and there he met them after his resurrection, and he commanded them to go and preach the gospel to every creature; to tell men the glad tidings, or good news, that he had died to save sinners, and that whosoever believed in him should never perish; and that he had risen again, and was therefore an ever-living Saviour, to whom all sinners might look for salvation to the end of time. When any professed sincerely to believe their message, they were to baptize them with water "in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost," one God; and this was to show, that in like manner, the Holy Spirit would purify their hearts who truly believed in him, and was to be a bold avowal before the world, that they were the followers of him who was crucified. As a further proof that those baptized were his followers, they were to do all his holy commands, and then all of them might expect his blessing and favour, "even unto the end of the world. Amen."





THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO ST. MARK.

THE FIRST CHAPTER OF ST. MARK.

“The gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.”—Ver. 1.

MARK is shorter than Matthew. It is merely a repetition of the same history by another hand, with here and there some few facts not mentioned by Matthew. Some of these are all that need therefore be added in this place.

In the *fourth* chapter we have the Parable of the Seed, which appears to have been delivered at the same time that the Parable of the Sower was, as we have read in Matthew, but was not mentioned by him with that parable. Thus, that nothing important might be lost, one evangelist has supplied what another has omitted, as well as confirmed the truth of all that the other has said.

The parable given by Mark is contained in the verses between the twenty-fifth and the thirtieth, of the fourth chapter; and, from the manner of seed growing, after it is cast into the ground, and though the sower sleeps, yet, springing up—he hardly knows how—our blessed Lord encourages his ministers and friends to spread abroad his gospel, which, though they may not always see its fruits suddenly, will, in like manner, spring up in the hearts of men. So he encourages my labouring for you, my young friend, and all such labours, by signifying, in this parable, that, as the wheat springs up, first in the blade, and then in the shape of the ear, and then bears the full corn in the ear,—in like manner, his blessed word sown in the heart shall spring up and produce its blessed fruits. But then it must be sown there. Is it sown in your heart? Do you receive it there as the word of God? If





THE PARABLE
OF THE
VINEYARD

ST MARK XII.





BETHSAIDA.



so, you will not trifle with it. You will not forget, but try all in your power to remember it. And, if you remember it properly, you will obey it, and call it to recollection at all times, so that it will direct you in all your actions.

In the *seventh* chapter, Mark gives us the particulars of Christ's curing a deaf man. "And he put his fingers in his ears, and he spit, and touched his tongue. And looking up to heaven, he sighed, and saith unto him, Be opened," and his deafness was cured, and "he spake plain." Most likely he might have once had his hearing, and have learned to speak a little, but having lost his hearing early in life, he could learn no more; but now with his hearing he learns also to speak. This kind action of Christ made the people look upon him with admiration, and they said, "He hath done all things well; he maketh both the deaf to hear and the dumb to speak."

You may perhaps ask why Christ put his fingers in the deaf person's ears, and spat upon his tongue? I cannot tell you; but most likely to show us, that we must use means to get our diseases cured; and, by his looking up to heaven, we are taught to pray to God to bless all means used to cure us when we are sick; and, by his sighing, I suppose he showed his compassion for the unfortunate, and thought at the moment of the evils which sin has brought upon mankind.

In the *eighth* chapter is related the cure of a blind man at Bethsaida, on whose eyes he spit, and he put his hand upon them. And the man directly saw men as trees walking: he could not exactly make out their shape from a tree. He put his hands on his eyes a second time, and then he saw clearly: teaching us, perhaps, to persevere in the use of proper means. But both in this case and in that of the deaf man, the means were only signs; they could never have cured the man if administered by a common physician: these were miracles,—things not of a common kind, and showed that he who performed them could only be the Son of God.

In the last chapter we have some further particulars about Christ's resurrection; and his encouragement to his disciples to preach his gospel and work miracles in his name, which would





prove that their message was divine, and establish the truth of it at its beginning, before all the world. They were to cast out devils, who then possessed the bodies of men, just as Jesus had cast them out; they were to speak new languages which they had never learnt, so as to be able to tell men of every country about the way of salvation through Jesus Christ; they were to take up serpents without being bitten or endangered by them; if any attempt should be made to poison them, the deadly portion, which would kill other persons, should do them no harm; and if sick persons were brought to them to be cured, they should only lay their hands upon them, and they would recover. You must, however, remember that there was this great distinction between the miracles performed by Jesus and those performed by his disciples, that Jesus did all his by his own power, and without using any other name; but the power which the disciples had was not their own, but only what he gave them, and they were to work miracles only in his name; and thus, when the apostle Peter cured a lame man, as we shall soon read in the Acts, he said, "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk." These miracles are not now needed, because we have so many proofs left us that they were done by the first ministers, and the religion of Jesus is every where spread and spreading without them. Besides, his Holy Spirit, by working powerfully on the hearts of sinners, in converting or turning them from their wicked ways, is working miracles every day. None can turn the bad heart into a good one but God himself; but he makes the unbeliever to believe, and turns him from the slavery of sin to serve him, the living and true God.

Mark further informs us more than Matthew, as he not only mentions Christ's command to his disciples, but the effect of their obeying it, and preaching the gospel to every creature; for "they went forth and preached every where, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following." Amen.





THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO ST. LUKE.

THE FIRST CHAPTER OF ST. LUKE.

The Birth of John the Baptist.

“And the child grew and waxed strong in spirit, and was in the deserts, till the day of his showing unto Israel.”—Ver. 80.

LUKE is thought to have been the same mentioned by the apostle Paul in several of his Epistles, and especially in that to the Colossians, as “Luke the beloved physician.”

It seems that many persons, who were witnesses of what Luke relates about Christ, or had heard many things respecting the Saviour from those who knew him on earth, were writing a similar history about him. The four Evangelists, however, were the best qualified for this, and the church of Christ, in the earliest age, received their accounts as the most correct.

This Evangelist tells us some particulars about the birth of John the Baptist, which are not mentioned by the other three. That his father was a priest of the name of Zacharias—that his wife's name was Elizabeth, and that she was sprung from the race of Aaron—that they were both very good people, and walked together in the holy ways of God—and that John the Baptist was born when they were “well stricken in years,” or quite old.

The birth of this remarkable forerunner of Christ was predicted, like that of his Divine Master, in a very wonderful way. John's father, Zacharias, was burning incense in the





temple, while the people "were praying without," when an angel appeared to him and told him that his son should be born, and that he must call him John—a name which means, *the grace and favour of God*; and this was to show, that God's grace would be upon him in a very striking manner. He was to be separated from the world, like the ancient Nazarites, (Numb. vi. 3) to drink "neither wine nor strong drink;" and God would bless his preaching, so that he should turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. He should have the same holiness, courage, and zeal, as Elias, or Elijah, to turn the disobedient into the ways of wisdom. Zacharias, though a good man, doubted the truth of what the angel told him, and asked for some sign from which he might have better reason to believe that what he said would come to pass. The angel told him he should be dumb till the child was born, and this should be a sign, and, at the same time, a reproof for his doubting the message which God had sent.

The people wondered that Zacharias should remain so long in the temple, and when he came out he had lost his speech, as the angel had said. Elizabeth, his wife, at length had a son; and when he was to be circumcised at eight days old, he had his name given to him. It was usual to name the son after the father, and the friends and relations present would have had him called Zacharias, but Elizabeth having been informed in writing, by her husband, of all that had taken place,—in obedience to the command of the angel, would have him called John. The friends, however, asked the father what he would have him called; and he by signs asked for a writing tablet, or little table made of brass, wood, or wax, used in those days,—and wrote or scratched upon it, as they then did with an iron pen, "His name is John. And they marvelled all."

No sooner had Zacharias obeyed the divine command, than his tongue was unloosed, and he spake as before.

This event, which caused so great wonder among all present, was soon reported throughout the hill country of Judea, where they dwelt: and all that feared God were filled with awe at this extraordinary child, and anxiously waited to see for what purpose he had been sent into the world.





His father, Zacharias, was then "filled with the Holy Ghost," or the Holy Spirit inspired him to prophesy about the coming of Christ. And John grew up, but loved retirement, and went into desert and lonely places, no doubt God holding sweet communion with his spirit, or talking as it were with his holy mind; and so he remained till he came to proclaim Christ's coming, "preaching in the wilderness of Judea," as we have already seen in Matthew.

THE SECOND CHAPTER OF ST. LUKE.

The Birth and Early Days of Jesus Christ.

"For unto you is born this day, a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord."—Verse 11.

About the same time that John the Baptist was born, Jesus was born also: John was born not more than six months before Christ. At this time Cæsar Augustus, who was the second Emperor of Rome, reigned over that empire, which had become so large from its conquests that it was called "all the world." Judea, you know, was then tributary to it, or paid taxes to the Roman government. But a particular sort of tax was now determined on by the Emperor, which is called a poll-tax, or tax upon the head of every person; and to make sure of all the subjects in the empire, they were obliged to attend in person at an appointed place, and be enrolled, or entered in a book.

It is a remarkable fact, that the Emperor had resolved on this tax twenty-seven years before; but disturbances in the empire distracted his attention, and it was only now, when all the world were at peace, that he had time to attend to it. See here how Providence overrules all things. Had he been able to carry his purpose into effect before, then the mother of Jesus would not have been there with her husband Joseph, and Jesus would not have been born in Bethlehem, but at Nazareth, where he was afterwards





brought up. But if he had been born at Nazareth instead of Bethlehem, then the prophecy respecting him would not have been fulfilled, as recorded in the fifth chapter of Micah, and the second verse, and the fact that he was the true Messiah would have so far been doubtful. But here the ambitious views of a Roman Emperor to fill his coffers with money, were made to bring about the fulfilment of God's promise to his church, by bringing the parents of Jesus to Bethlehem, the place prophesied of, where he was born.

At this time one Cyrenius was governor of Syria, which was annexed to Judea, and he had the management of the tax. And every one went to his own city where he was born, or the place where his inheritance lay; and as Joseph's family sprung from David's city, and, indeed, from David himself, though he was now a poor man,—he had to go up to Bethlehem.

The city was so crowded that there was no room for the infant Saviour and his mother in the place, called by us the Inn, though rather a sort of lodging-place only. He was, therefore, born and lodged in a place for the accommodation of cattle.

Now there were some shepherds in the fields near Bethlehem, who were lying out watching their flocks at night, to preserve them from beasts of prey, when an angel appeared to them, surrounded with a bright glory, and told them not to be afraid, for he came not to hurt them, but to tell them the glad news, that the long-expected Saviour was born. And a multitude of other happy spirits joined the first messenger, and sang in the sweetest strains—"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will towards men"—that is, glory be to God in the highest heavens, and let all the happy spirits there praise him, for peace is now to dwell upon earth in Christ, the great peace-maker between God and guilty men, and every kind of blessing will proceed from him.

And when the angels departed, the shepherds went to Bethlehem and saw Jesus, as the messenger had exactly described him, "wrapped in swaddling clothes," or bound closely up, as was the way in England a hundred and fifty years ago, instead of infants having their limbs free, as they are now,—and he was "lying in a manger." And they told every one they knew what wonderful





things they had seen, and praised God for his great mercy in sending a Saviour into the world. Let us praise him too.

After this Jesus was *circumcised*. This was a Jewish ceremony, by which he became a member of the church and nation. Then he was *redeemed*, another custom of the Jews; for when God slew all the first-born of the Egyptians, he protected the Israelites, who, according to his command, given through Moses, had sprinkled the lintels and posts of their doors with the blood of the pass-over Lamb; and from that time he kept up the remembrance of this mercy, by demanding the first-born to be consecrated to him; "for," said he, by Moses, "all the first-born of the children of Israel are mine, both man and beast: on the day that I smote every first-born in the land of Egypt, I sanctified them for myself." Instead of giving them up, however, to the service of the tabernacle, which was consecrating them entirely to God, as the Levites were,—"the first-born of man might be redeemed for five shekels," or about three dollars and twelve cents of our money, which went to the service of the sanctuary. As no mention is, however, made here of the performance of this custom, it is supposed by some, that "in case of poverty, the priest was allowed take less, or perhaps nothing." Our Lord's mother also *presented her offering*, a further custom usual on such an occasion. Had she been able she ought to have presented a lamb for a burnt-offering, and a dove for a sin-offering; but as she was poor, and not able to purchase a lamb, she took two turtle-doves; for so the Lord had ordered by Moses, "If she be not able to bring a lamb, then she shall bring two turtles, or two young pigeons; the one for a burnt-offering, and the other for a sin-offering: and the priest shall make an atonement for her, and she shall be clean." This custom was to teach the Jews, and us also, that we ought to thank God for all our mercies, and that when we do so, we should express our unworthiness of them by confessing our sins—we must present the sin-offering together with the burnt-offering.

While the infant Jesus was in the temple, there came in a good old man named Simeon, who had been anxiously waiting for the coming of the Messiah; and God having shown him by his Holy Spirit that the Saviour, whom his heart desired to see, had come,





he took him up in his arms, and blessed God that he had lived to see him, and said, he could now depart in peace, since he had seen God's salvation. "One Anna, a prophetess," who was eighty-four years of age, also entered the temple, and "gave thanks unto the Lord, and spake of" Jesus "unto all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem."

After these things Joseph and Mary, with the infant Saviour, "returned into Galilee, to their own city Nazareth."



And the child Jesus was brought up at Nazareth, under the care of his parents, and he waxed, or grew, "strong in spirit," giving signs of a wonderful mind, and of great piety, for "the grace of God was upon him." And here you may observe, that those children are the most like Jesus that give the most evidence that they love and fear God.

When Jesus was twelve years old, his parents went up to the temple, to the feast of the passover, in remembrance of the deliverance from Egypt, and he went with them. Not that he had not been before, but something now occurred which made the Evangelist Luke take notice of him at this age. For, when the feast was over, and they returned with a number of other families that had gone for the same purpose, Jesus remained behind. His parents did not miss him till the end of the day; for as he was amiable and beloved by all who knew him, they supposed that he was among some of their friends and acquaintances on the road; but not hearing anything of him, they became uneasy, and went back the next day to Jerusalem, and it was not till the third day that they found him. But where was he? Not in bad company, for he never stood in the way of sinners; nor was he at play, for he





SIMEON AND ANNA IN THE TEMPLE.



JULIE FLIGHT INTO EGYPT.



CHRIST DISPUTING WITH THE DOCTORS.



was of an age to learn, and he was improving his time, and getting knowledge from the doctors of the temple. The teachers of the law were used to instruct the young there, and they were allowed to ask any questions they pleased, for the purpose of learning. Jesus had, therefore, placed himself at their feet, and was "both hearing them and asking them questions." "And all that heard him were astonished at his understanding and answers."

His parents wondered to find what he was about, and to see how much he was approved. And his mother gently chided him for having given them so much alarm for his safety; but he replied, "Wist ye not," or, know ye not, "that I was about my Father's business," or, "in my Father's house?"

His mother remembered this and other sayings, and waited to see what wonderful works he would do when he should grow up and become a man.

So they returned to Nazareth, and there he lived obedient to his parents, and growing in favour "both with God and men;" his behaviour, says the pious Dr. Doddridge, "being not only remarkably religious, but so benevolent and obliging as to gain the favour and affection of all that were about him."

You will observe that most of these interesting facts about the birth and early days of Jesus Christ, are not mentioned by the Evangelists Matthew and Mark, and are therefore given by Luke.

THE THIRD AND FOURTH CHAPTERS OF ST. LUKE.

Christ persecuted at Nazareth.

And when he had opened the book, he found the place where it was written,

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised,

"To preach the acceptable year of the Lord."—Chap. iv. 17, 18, 19.





We shall now glance at some other matters mentioned by this Evangelist which have not been before noticed, and run through many chapters.

Luke tells us the exact time when John the Baptist made his first public appearance. It was in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Cæsar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea ; and, as the dominions of Herod the Great had been divided after his death, *Herod Antipas*, one of his sons, was *tetrarch of Galilee*, or governor of that fourth of his dominions ; and *his brother Philip*, tetrarch of another fourth part, which was *the region of Ituræa and Trachonitis*,—the name which was now given to the tract of land on the other side of Jordan, which had formerly belonged to the tribe of Manasseh,—and *Lysanias* was *tetrarch of Abilene*, a fair city of Syria, whose territories reached even to Lebanon and Damascus, and were peopled with great numbers of Jews. At that time, also, *Annas and Caiaphas* were *high priests*,—not that there were two real high priests, for the Jews had but one at a time, but Annas had been high priest, and had been removed, and his son-in-law, Caiaphas, appointed ; Annas was afterwards appointed again, and they officiated by turns for several years.

John the Baptist began his office, as we before read, preaching repentance. This Evangelist tells us what he said to the people, when they asked him what they should do to show that they repented. He told them that one mark was that the covetous should be charitable and kind. Then the publicans, or tax-gatherers, asked him, and he told them that they must not be dishonest, and take from others more than they ought to do ; a practice which was common among them. The soldiers also asked him the same question, and he told them to injure nobody by violence, and not to raise mutinies and seditions. We see by this, that whatever bad conduct we have been accustomed to we must entirely forsake if we would sincerely repent.

The third chapter contains a long list of names like the first chapter of St. Matthew. They are, however, reversed in their order, and somewhat different, but both are designed to trace up the genealogy of Jesus Christ through its proper line—that is, to show who were his forefathers after the flesh. Matthew traces it forward





from Abraham down to Joseph; and Luke traces it backwards from Mary, or Joseph as the husband of Mary, and so the son, by marriage of Heli, who was Mary's father. In looking through them you will see that Joseph and Mary were both of the house and lineage of David, and therefore Christ was the son of David, as he was called, and the true Messiah who was to spring up in his line.





John the Baptist having been thrown into prison by the wicked Herod, Jesus went into the interior of Galilee.

There his fame had already spread, and he went from place to place, teaching in the synagogues, while every one admired him, and declared, "they never heard such preaching in all their lives." "And he came to Nazareth," where he had been brought up, and, as his custom was, "he went into the synagogue on the Sabbath, and stood up for to read," for this was a constant part of the Jewish worship. "And there was delivered unto him the book of the prophet Esaias," or Isaiah—the former being the Greek, and the latter the Hebrew, for the prophet's name—just, for instance, as Louis Philippe is the French for the late king of the French, and Lewis Philip the English name of the same king. "And when he had opened the book," or unrolled the volume—for the Hebrew Scriptures were written on long pieces of parchment, fastened at each end on sticks, and so rolled up—he found the place where there was written the forty-first chapter of Isaiah, and the first, second, and third verses. Having read the passage, "closed the book," and rolled it up, he "sat down," as the Jews used to do, to preach, while "the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on him," being very curious to know what he was going to say about a text which they knew described the Messiah. And he then discoursed upon the passage, and told them that the Scripture was that day fulfilled in their hearing.

His words were so full of grace, both in the precious truths which he uttered, and in the way in which he uttered them, that all his hearers were exceedingly surprised; but yet they could not forget that he was the son of the humble Joseph, and had been brought up at Nazareth under his care, "and they said, Is not this Joseph's son?"

Jesus knew what they thought. And he said, "Ye will surely say unto me this proverb, Physician, heal thyself." You have worked miracles abroad, now do so at home. "Whatsoever we have heard done in Capernaum, do also in thy country." And he said, "Verily, I say unto you, no prophet is accepted in his own country," which was another proverb, or common saying. By this he meant, that his miracles would be thrown away upon them; for





they would still think from whom he was descended, and wonder at what he did as they now wondered at what he said—but they would not believe in him as the true Messiah. In the days of Elias, or Elijah, though there were many widows living in Israel, he performed the miracle of multiplying the cruse of oil for a widow of Sarepta, a city of the Gentiles ; and in the time of Eliseus, or Elisha, the prophet, though there were many lepers in Israel, he cured none but Naaman, who also was a Syrian, and a heathen. So our blessed Saviour intimated, he would do miracles for and in the presence of heathen rather than before them, for he knew they were so hardened that they would not believe in him.

This faithful address turned their admiration into rage, and rising up at once in a tumultuous manner, without any reverence to the place or day, they violently cast him out of the synagogue, and out of the city too, and brought him to the very brow of the mountain on which their city was built, that they might cast him down headlong, and dash him to pieces. But Jesus, when he had permitted their madness to go thus far, confounded their sight in such a miraculous manner, that he passed through the midst of them unknown, and went away to the neighbouring city of Capernaum, where he abode for some time.

I have given you the latter part of this account in the words of Dr. Doddridge, because I think I cannot possibly make it more plain.

THE FIFTH, SIXTH, SEVENTH, EIGHTH AND NINTH CHAPTERS OF
ST. LUKE.

Christ's Miracle of the Draught of Fishes—Christ Raises the Widow's Son—The Penitent Woman.

“And there came a fear on all, and they glorified God, saying, That a great prophet is risen up among us, and that God has visited his people.”—Chap. vii. 16.

While our Lord was at Capernaum, we find him continually engaged in doing good, teaching in the synagogue, and instructing





the people at all other opportunities. Where he went he was attended by crowds, and, on one occasion, they were so great that they "pressed upon him to hear the word of God, as he stood by the lake of Gennesareth." Seeing two fishing-vessels near the shore he went into one of them, and, pushing off a little way from the shore, he there "sat down and taught the people out of the ship."

The fishermen who owned the vessels had been very unsuccessful in their last night's labours, for they had toiled all the night, and taken nothing. When Christ had done preaching, and feeding them with food for their souls, he now thought of their bodies also, and he desired them to launch out into the deep, and let down their nets for a draught of fishes. They had little hope of success, but, in obedience to Christ's word, they were disposed to try. The nets were let down, and they drew them up so full of fishes that one of them brake, and the fishes taken so overloaded both the vessels that they began to sink. All were astonished; and Simon Peter, who was one of the party, with his partners, James and John, the sons of Zebedee, fell down on his knees, and cried out, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord;"—meaning that he was not worthy of the high honour of having Jesus on board his vessel, and of continuing in his presence. Jesus encouraged the timid man, and told him that he would employ him in a far nobler work, and that henceforth he should catch men. And so it came to pass when,—if we compare the gospel to a net,—he caught three thousand souls at once by his preaching, as we shall read in the Acts of the Apostles. Matthew and Mark have given no more of what happened at this time than merely that Christ sat down in the ship and taught; so Luke has supplied what they omitted.

In the sixth chapter of Luke we find a beautiful discourse of our Lord's, something like that which we call the Beatitudes, in the beginning of Matthew. That, however, was delivered on a mount, and this on a plain; and, on examining them and comparing them together, we find them differing very much, though parts of the former discourse were repeated in this, it being another assembly.





MIRACLE AT NAIN.



MARY AND MARTHA.



In the seventh chapter, the Evangelist informs us of Christ's raising to life the son of the widow of Nain. He was just at the moment entering into that city, and a number of his disciples and followers were with him; and on approaching the gate, he met a funeral procession. The dead person was a young man, the only son of a widow. The custom was not to inclose the body in a coffin, as with us, but to carry it on an open bier, borne on the shoulders, just merely covering the corpse with a cloth. The poor widow followed in great sorrow, weeping, most likely, ready to break her heart; and who could help her? She seems to have been much respected, and so was her son, by the large concourse that attended the funeral; but her friends and neighbours could only pity her. Jesus pitied her too, for he had a heart full of tenderness, as he has now; but he could do something more for her than mere mortals, he had power even over death; and so he said kindly to the widow, "Weep not. And he came and touched the bier, and they that bare him stood still, and he said, Young man, I say unto thee, Arise. And he that was dead sat up, and began to speak; and he delivered him to his mother." Are not you delighted at this proof of his tenderness and power? I am: I even now feel my heart beating with joy as I think I see the poor widow rejoicing through her tears, drying them up, and eagerly embracing her beloved son, whom she had expected never more to see upon earth. O what pleasure there is in doing good, and in relieving the truly miserable! It gives pleasure to ourselves as well as to others. But I rejoice to think of this proof of our divine Lord's power; for he is the same now that he was then; and though he will no more prove his divine power by miracles like these, yet if we love and serve him, in the last day he shall raise us up, not to punish us for our sins, but to change our vile bodies, and give us everlasting life.

In the same chapter, we have also an account of a woman that had been a notorious sinner, who entered the house where Christ was dining with one of the Pharisees. He, as usual, was engaged in speaking the words of instruction, and she listened to him with the greatest attention. Every word touched her heart, and as his feet lay bare on the couch, according to custom, the tears fell in a





shower from her eyes, and bathed them all over. She, perceiving this, wiped them with the tresses of her hair, which hung loose about her shoulders, and then, not thinking herself worthy to anoint his head, she kissed his feet, and poured upon them some liquid perfume. The Pharisee was surprised that a holy prophet, as Jesus professed to be, should allow a woman of such a class to approach him; and though he did not speak, Jesus knew what he thought. And he told him there were two debtors; and the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty. As they were unable to pay, their creditor kindly forgave them. Now, he would ask the Pharisee, which of these was likely to love the kind creditor most? "Why," said the Pharisee, "the one who had most forgiven him." "Rightly said," answered our Lord; "now thou hast not had the sense of pardon as this woman. My words touched her heart; she has sincerely repented; her many sins are forgiven her, and she therefore loves me much." Oh, my young reader, we are all great sinners, and if we believe ourselves, like this woman, to be so, we shall bitterly repent, and turn to the Saviour, with weeping and supplication—for he knew how she pleaded in her heart. We shall also love him much, and though now we can neither bathe his feet with our tears, nor wipe them with the hairs of our head, nor anoint them with perfume, in token of our love to him, yet we can show our love to him by the expressions of our hearts, and by manifesting it towards all that love him.

Some think that this is the same woman that we read about in the twenty-sixth chapter of Matthew; but many who have carefully studied their Bible, think otherwise, and for these reasons: the story told by Matthew happened in Bethany, this in Galilee; that in the house of Simon the leper, and this in the house of Simon the pharisee; that was but two days before the death of Christ, and this a considerable time before; the ointment that woman poured was poured upon his head, and this upon his feet.

In the second verse of the eighth chapter we have mention made of "Mary called Magdalene," or Mary of Magdala, so called, just as Jesus was called Jesus of Nazareth; for Magdala was the place of residence of this Mary, as Nazareth was that of Jesus. Out of this woman our Lord cast seven evil spirits, which, I have





before remarked, were suffered then in an extraordinary manner to torment the minds and bodies of men. She was a notorious sinner, and these demons, in the opinion of the pious Dr. Doddridge, "probably for the sins of her former life, were suffered by God to agitate and torment her in such a manner as to render her a spectacle of great horror."

THE TENTH CHAPTER OF ST. LUKE.

The Seventy Disciples sent forth—The inquiring Lawyer—The Good Samaritan—Martha and Mary.

"And he turned him unto his disciples, and said privately, Blessed are the eyes which see the things which ye see; for I tell you that many prophets and kings have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them."—Ver. 23, 24.

In the tenth chapter we are told, that, besides the twelve apostles, which Jesus chose to be witnesses to his truth, and to declare it to the world,—he also sent forth seventy disciples, who were to go in company with each other, two one way and two another way, and so with the whole. But while they were to conduct themselves harmlessly as lambs, they were to expect to meet with furious behaviour from those wicked men who would hate their doctrines, and be ready like wolves to tear them in pieces. They were also to depend upon his providence to incline the hearts of men to supply them with what they might need, and were, therefore, to take no purse for their money, nor scrip or bag for their provisions, nor any more shoes than they had on their feet. They were, moreover, to salute no one by the way, for the Eastern mode of saluting is sometimes long and tedious, and therefore, while they were to be rude to none, they were to show that more important business engaged their attention than mere talk about common affairs. When they entered into any house they were not to forget the accustomed civility used in the East,





and to say, as the people usually said, "Peace be to this house;" and if they were kindly entertained, they were thankfully to partake of what was freely given them. Those who received them would be the gainers by their visit, for he gave them power to heal the sick, and they were to declare the glad tidings that the time of preaching the gospel of salvation was come, and to say "the kingdom of God is come nigh unto you."

If, however, they were not kindly received, then they were to leave the place, and as the Jews, when they had been abroad and returned from any heathen country, wiped the dust from their feet, lest it should pollute their land, which they considered as holy, —so these disciples were then to wipe the dust from off their feet, as a sign that they separated themselves for ever from such sinful and hardened people.



And now he mentioned the awful state of Chorazin and Bethsaida,—cities where he had preached and performed his glorious





miracles, so that the inhabitants, if they had reflected, must have seen that he was the true Messiah, the Son of God, and have repented and believed his words. Instead of which they rejected him in spite of all the words he spoke, and the mighty deeds he performed, to prove that his message was divine,—and so now they must perish. Tyre and Sidon were very wicked cities, but these were more wicked; for Tyre and Sidon had never heard nor seen such things as were made known to the people of Capernaum and Bethsaida.

It is very awful to despise or neglect the message of Jesus Christ. And this may still be done. He speaks to us yet in his word and by his faithful servants, and while they speak his word, he still says in that word, "He that heareth you heareth me; and he that despiseth you despiseth me: and he that despiseth me despiseth him that sent me."

Thus encouraged by their divine Lord, the disciples went forth; and, having gone on their circuit, they returned and told their Master of their great success, and that they had even cast out devils at the mention of his authority. He then told them that he saw Satan, when he was for rebellion, cast out of heaven quick as lightning, and he still foresaw that his power on earth should be destroyed. They should trample on venomous creatures and receive no hurt, but much more should the preaching of his word break down the power which evil spirits might have over the minds of men. Yet they were not to glory in being able to perform miracles, for they could do nothing without his aid and might; but they ought indeed to glory, when he told them that their names were "written in heaven;" and that as citizens were often enrolled, or their names written in the books of cities where they dwelt, so they were considered by him as the citizens of that happy place, as much as if such a book of their names were actually kept there. Then Jesus expressed the gladness of his heart that the great truths taught by him and his disciples, though rejected by the haughty doctors and the learned philosophers or wise men, were received even by babes. By babes he meant, not infants which are carried in the arms, for they could not even understand common words; but perhaps good little





children who were ready to learn of his disciples, and also all those who, with as much humility and simplicity as we may suppose they would show, were ready to hear and receive the news of mercy through Jesus Christ.

While our Lord was talking to the seventy disciples, a lawyer—or one of the writers and expounders of the Jewish law, came to him, and said, “Master,” or Teacher, “what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” Our Lord asked him what he read in his own law? And he said he found there, that he was to love God with all his heart, and his neighbour as himself. “Do this,” said Jesus, “and thou shalt live.” This is the grand proof of our religion, if we truly love God, and endeavour to do the best sort of good to our neighbours. The lawyer next inquired, “And who is my neighbour?” Jesus told him in the interesting *parable of the Good Samaritan*.

I am afraid of making my work too large, and so I must refer you for this and other parables I may have occasion to notice, to the places where you will find them written. This parable begins at the thirtieth verse of this tenth chapter. I must merely tell you that the road from Jerusalem to Jericho was, and still is, very dreary, and has always been a lurking place for robbers, so that it was called the “bloody way;” that priests and Levites often travelled that road, for some thousands of them lived at Jericho, and they had frequent occasions to go to Jerusalem; that the Jews and Samaritans hated each other greatly, and so the kindness of the good Samaritan, in relieving a poor injured Jew, while even his own priest and Levite cruelly passed him by, was so much the more to be admired; and that the two pence mentioned by our Lord mean Roman denarii, which were worth about fifteen cents each. I will end all I shall say about this parable by the words of our divine Lord to the lawyer; and when you meet with an enemy in distress, do not be revenged upon him, but “Go and do likewise.” This will be doing like Jesus Christ; “for,” says the apostle Paul, “while we were yet enemies Christ died for us.” He died, indeed, before we were born, but he who knew all things, gave himself for us sinners, when he knew what we should be. Let us then learn to show



THE PARABLE OF THE UNJUST STEWARD.

LUKE XVI





THE PARABLE

OF THE

RIGHT MAN

WHO

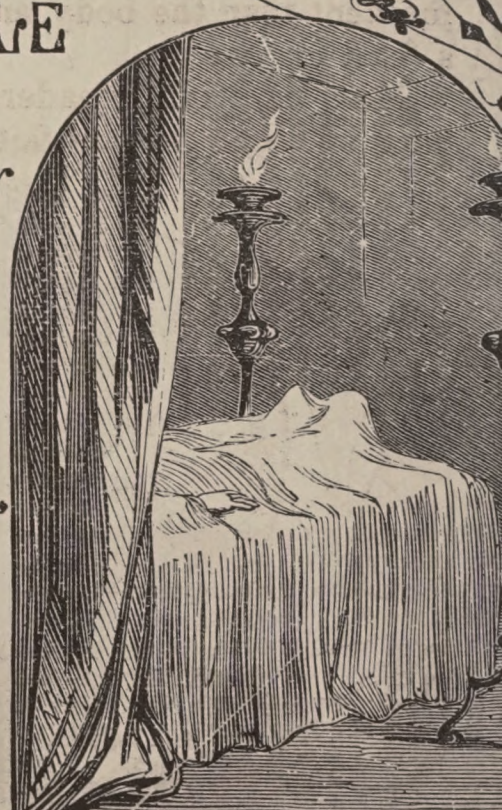
SET UP

GREATER

BARN'S.



ST LUKE XII.





kindness to the miserable, as "the kindness and love of God our Saviour" has been shown to us.

This chapter closes with an account of a visit which Jesus paid to Martha and Mary, two pious sisters who lived at Bethany, a village about two miles from Jerusalem. No sooner had he entered the house than he began to teach them heavenly things, and Mary was so delighted that she placed herself on the ground at his feet, according to the custom of learners with their teachers, and attentively heard his word. Martha was very hospitable, and immediately set to work to get some refreshment for Jesus and those that were with him. Being much hurried, and at last put out of temper, that things could not be got ready just as she wished, and wanting more help, she went to seek for Mary, and finding her sitting at the feet of Jesus, she said, pettishly, "Lord, dost thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone? Bid her, therefore, that she help me." But Jesus reproved Martha, for though she meant well, she did what was wrong. She had put herself out of temper, and that was wrong; and she had neglected a good opportunity to hear the best things from her Lord's lips, and that was wrong. Jesus, therefore, said to her, "Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things, but one thing there is needful," the knowledge of the way to heaven, "and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her." She is feeding her soul, which is of much more moment than the body, and the "bread of life" shall serve her for a feast for ever.

May, my young readers, all have grace to choose Mary's good part, and like her, by faith, sit at Jesus' feet and hear his word.





THE ELEVENTH AND TWELFTH CHAPTERS OF ST. LUKE.

Jesus teaches his Disciples to pray—The Parable of the Rich Fool—The waiting Servants.

“Blessed are those servants, whom the Lord when he cometh shall find watching.”—Chap. xii. 37.

Our blessed Saviour often retired to pray; and he taught his disciples to pray. Good Mr. Henry says, ‘he is a brute and a monster that never prays; that never gives glory to his Maker, nor feels his favour, nor owns his dependence upon him.’ Now, we think it very rude behaviour if a child receives even a piece of cake from the hand of a little play-mate and does not thank him for it. But shall we receive bread every day of our lives from the great and good God, and not thank him for it—and not only bread, but clothes and protection, and health, and all the good we have? If children’s parents kindly give them some of these things, it is only because God’s bounty first gave them to them, and so enabled them to give to their children, so these must feel indebted to God. Good parents, too, take care of their children; yet after all their care, if God’s eye of Providence did not watch them every hour, they would constantly be falling into danger; and the care of parents may help to keep us in health, or to restore us from sickness, but neither could we have health if God did not give it to us, nor get better when ill, if God did not give success to the means. Yet these are but common mercies, though they are of great value. God sent his Son to die for us, that we might trust in him as our Saviour, and that our souls might be happy for ever. And he grants us his grace to trust in him, for without it we shall not. And he gives us his holy word to tell us every day, what we ought to do to please him, and to be happy ourselves. And must we not be ungrateful indeed if we were never to thank him, when we receive his mercies; and insensible indeed never to feel our need of them, and so to ask him to grant





their continuance? It is a wonder that he gives his common favours to any who do not ask him, but his spiritual favours he certainly will not; here we must ask that we may receive. No pardon—no holiness—no true happiness, can be had without prayer. And therefore our Lord taught his disciples what we call the Lord's Prayer, which is repeated here, and which we have before seen in the sixth chapter of Matthew. In this, however, there are not mentioned all the things we may ask; for we find many other prayers, or parts of prayer, in scripture, as David's and Solomon's, and Daniel's, and those contained in the epistles, especially of the apostle Paul.

And here he particularly reminds his disciples, that when they pray, they must be in earnest. And he tells them, that if any one of them happened to be out of bread, and a friend should come to see him late in the evening, and he should be obliged to borrow some, as the Jews used to do of each other, it might happen that the house would be shut up, at which he might knock. But then, what will he do, will he go away? No, he will knock and knock again. By and by he is perhaps told by his friend that he is in bed, and his children are fast asleep, and that if he should get up to lend the bread, it would disturb all the family. But he takes no denial and continues knocking, till at last wearied out with the noise, he gets up and gives, not so much because his friend has asked, as because he would give him no rest till he got what he wanted.

By this our blessed Lord would teach his disciples, and us also, that we must not pray in a hurry, but keep on knocking at the door of mercy, and earnestly ask, as if we wanted indeed to have; and if the man's friend was obliged to give him bread on account of his pressing him so much, then much more would our gracious Father in heaven give good things to them that ask him.

In the twelfth chapter Luke relates *the parable of the Rich Fool*, as we call it. I should like you to read it, from the sixteenth to the twenty-first verses. Our Lord describes in it a rich man, who had large barns, full of what his lands had produced, and so much stock that he did not know where to put it. So he resolved to build new barns in the room of the old ones, and to make them





larger. And then he thought, "How happy I shall be! I have many years yet to live, and my soul and body may be both at ease: so I will eat, drink, and be merry." But he never thought of thanking God for his wealth, or laying any of it out for his glory. So just as he fancied he had got all things to his mind, God sent death to him, and spake to his conscience by his Providence, "Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee!" Dear young reader, there are many such fools in the world, and they are the worst kind of fools, for they reckon on long life, when life at the best is short; they take care of their bodies, but forget their souls; they become rich for this world, but lay up no treasure in heaven. Let us remember the rich fool.

In the thirty-fifth verse, our Lord says, "Let your loins be girded about, and your lamps burning; and ye yourselves like unto men that wait for your Lord, when he will return from the wedding." Among the Jews weddings took place at night. The servants, therefore, would have to sit up for their masters, and must keep their lamps trimmed ready to light them. If the lamps went out, it would be a sign of negligence, or, that instead of watching, they were asleep. The garments being long, like a morning gown, it was also usual to tuck them up and gird them close round the waist, if any thing needed to be quickly done. By mentioning these customs, our Lord would show the disciples and us, that as his servants, we should always be ready to meet him at his coming. Death, at his command, will take away all that we have; but as one would watch a thief, expected to come at midnight, so ought we to be upon our watch, and then, when called to die, we shall not be taken by surprise. The faithful steward, who uses his time and talents for the divine glory, shall be richly rewarded; but he who presumes on his Lord's delaying, and does wicked things, must suffer the most dreadful consequences. As the faithless and disobedient servant was, by the Jewish people, scourged with stripes, so shall all such receive the sorest punishment, and that punishment shall be the greater for those who have been taught good things, and choose to do those that are bad.



THE PARABLE OF THE PRODIGAL SON.

LUKE XV.



THE PARABLE OF THE LOST SHEEP.

LUKE XV.





THE THIRTEENTH OF ST. LUKE TO THE END.

The Parable of the barren Fig-tree—Of the highest Seat—Of the lost Piece of Money—Of the Prodigal Son.

“He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.”—Chap. xiv. 35.

My limits now oblige me unavoidably to pass over many things in this gospel, which I should be glad to explain to you; but there are many parables given by this evangelist, which we do not find in the others, and as I wish particularly to explain them, I must beg you to place your testament before you, and refer to and read them, before you read my short remarks, which I hope, by God's blessing, will be some help to you in the right understanding of them.

The first is *the Barren Fig-tree*, in the thirteenth chapter, from the sixth to the ninth verse.

Explanation.—The tree referred to by our Lord was a sort of white fig, which, if it did not bear fruit in three years, rarely bore any at all. This tree represented the unbelieving Jews, whom God had favoured with great privileges; and sent his prophets and his Son among them, to call them to repentance; but still they had not glorified him. Still he had been patient with them, and had not punished them as they deserved, but all in vain. His kind care over them must therefore soon cease, and they be ruined like a tree cut down.

I hope, my young reader, that you are not like this barren fig-tree, which, with all the care bestowed upon it, never rewarded the labourer's toil. God has been very patient with you too; he has not destroyed you, when you have been very wicked and unprofitable; but if you do not bear fruit to his glory, you cannot tell how much longer he may spare you. He may, and does indeed, often take away the good at an early period, but then they are only like the pleasant tree, transplanted from the garden of Zion below, to the Zion or Paradise above. “The ungodly are not so,” but are like fuel prepared for the fire.





In the fourteenth chapter, from the seventh to the eleventh verse, we have the parable of *the Highest Seat*.

Explanation.—We have some ceremonies among us about taking a seat, but in the



East the ceremonies are much greater. The Persians in particular, when invited to a feast, will wedge themselves in at the table just at the place where they suppose their rank entitles them to sit. The master of the feast may, however, raise any one as high up the table as he pleases. The Greeks have the same custom at their wedding feasts, and if any take a place higher than they

ought, they are very likely to get put down lower.

Our Lord here teaches us, "that pride will have shame, and will at last have a fall."

The parable of the great supper, which follows, has been explained in the twenty-second of Matthew.

In the fifteenth chapter we read the parable of *the Lost Sheep*; it is explained at the end of the eighteenth chapter of Matthew.

From the eighth to the tenth verse you find the parable of *the Lost Piece of Money*. I cannot better explain it than in the words of Mr. Henry. "A soul plunged in the world, and overwhelmed in the love of it, and care about it, is like a piece of money in the dirt; any one would say it is a thousand pities it should lie there. God, by the methods of his grace, is seeking after lost souls, and so in his mercy he brings them to himself. Has yours yet been found, or will it lie and perish like precious coin in the dirt? Say, "Lord, save me, or I perish!" I have done so, and so must you, or you can never hope to be saved.

The Prodigal Son is a most delightful parable, from the eleventh verse to the end of this chapter. It is quite affecting to read it.





Explanation.—This parable represents to us the Jews under the character of the eldest son; they having long been treated as God's children, while the Gentiles were not so; and how they felt themselves mortified when our blessed Lord gave them to understand that the Gentiles should be also blessed in the Christ, the true Messiah. It shows us also how the sinner, choosing his own ways, goes afar from God, our common Father, and so from real happiness. And it points out the folly of those young persons who will break through every restraint, and have their own way, which most frequently brings on misery, and often ruin. It likewise teaches us at the greatest extreme of misery and wretchedness not to despair, but to go to a merciful God, who will look upon our tears, will hear our supplications, and will yet receive us graciously in his tender mercies, through Jesus Christ our Saviour.

The sixteenth chapter begins with *the Unjust Steward*, and it is contained in the first eight verses. You will see that a steward, who had wasted his lord's goods, being called to an account, contrived to secure to himself a number of friends from among his lord's debtors, by setting down their accounts at much less than they owed, that so, when his master should turn him away, he might, by cheating him, have made them his friends.

Explanation.—"This world," says one, "is a house; heaven the roof; the stars the lights; the earth with its fruits, a table spread; the Master of the house is the holy and blessed God; man is the steward, into whose hands the goods of this house are delivered; if he behave himself well, he shall find favour in the eyes of his Lord; if not, he shall be turned out of his stewardship." We see in this parable that one step of sin leads on towards another, and that he who begins to cheat will soon easily go on cheating. Roguery is, however, sooner or later discovered, and then it ends in the disgrace of the offender. Yet bad as it is to act unjustly towards man, it is worse when we consider that we cannot do wickedly towards others without breaking God's law. Such a steward must break the sacred command, "Thou shalt not steal;" and God marks those who wickedly break his righteous laws. Alas, dear young reader! though we may not have committed quite as barefaced a sin as this steward, yet we have too





often wasted our precious time, neglected God's ordinances, or carelessly performed our duty. So that we must own ourselves unprofitable servants. Let us try no bad means of quieting our minds, but rather humbly confess our faults, and ask a forgiving Lord for pardon through his dear Son.

In the nineteenth and following verses we have the parable of *the Rich Man and Lazarus*.

Explanation.—The expression, "Abraham's bosom," used here, was used by the Jews to express paradise. We must remember that this is only a parable, as the happy in paradise, and the wicked in hell, are too far apart ever to talk with each other. But it is meant, as Mr. Henry says, to teach us "that poor, godly people, whom men neglect and trample upon, die away out of their miseries, and go to heavenly bliss and joy, which is made more pleasant to them by their preceding sorrows; and that rich epicures, that live in luxury, and are unmerciful to the poor, die and go into a state of insupportable torment, which is the more grievous and terrible to them, because of the sensual lives they lived, and that there is no gaining any relief for their torments.

In the seventeenth chapter is a short parable, which we call *the Servant in the Field*. It is to teach us that when we serve God ever so diligently, we have only done our duty, and have merited nothing from his hands.

In the eleventh and following verses, we read of *ten lepers* which Christ cured, but out of the ten only *one* gave him glory for what he had done. Was not this ungrateful? But ask yourself, how many mercies have I received and have forgotten to praise God for them? "In every thing give thanks," and bless the kind Giver.

The eighteenth chapter begins with the parable of *the Unjust Judge*, which, as the introduction of it tells us, is to teach us "that men ought always to pray and not to faint," for, if the unjust judge could be wearied to do what the poor widow needed, surely God will not suffer those who love him to plead with him in vain.

The last parable that requires our notice in this book is that of *the Pharisee and Publican*. It is included in the tenth and





following verses. The Pharisee represents those who think there is merit in their performing their religious duties, and who hope to be saved by them; while the publican represents the humble-hearted sinner, who feels no pride in praying, but only feels his need of God's mercy. You see that God would not hear such proud prayers as the Pharisee's, for, though there was no harm in thanking God he was better than others, if he had thanked God that his grace made him to differ—yet when he prided himself in what he did, and told God of it, as though he deserved God's praise, God, who knows how imperfect are our best deeds, would not look upon him with approbation; "for God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble." You see also, that the most simple prayer, if humbly offered in faith, is kindly regarded by our gracious God—even "God be merciful to me a sinner." But it is not merely our lips saying so that is prayer, we must say so from *the heart*. If we feel that we are sinners, we shall feel our need of a Saviour, and look for mercy only through Jesus Christ our Lord.

We close this Gospel with the account given of Zaccheus the publican, or tax-gatherer, who was very rich: and as Jesus was passing through Jericho, he wished much to see him. But he was a very short man, and could not see among the crowd, so he got up into a sycamore, or kind of fig-tree. Jesus looked up, and told him, by name, to come down, for he meant to go with him to his house. Zaccheus was delighted at this, but many were mortified, and, no doubt, many of the Pharisees, for they said that Jesus was gone to be a guest with a sinner. Yes, Jesus Christ "came into the world to save sinners." And now the heart of Zaccheus was touched by his grace. He had been an oppressive and unjust tax-gatherer, and had wronged those of whom he had collected, to enrich himself. But he was not ashamed to confess his sins, and to make recompense to those whom he had injured, and so to repent. Jesus saw that he was sincere. He knew, too, that his heart was ready to receive him as his Saviour. Zaccheus becoming blessed, would now be a blessing to others. "This day," said Jesus, "is salvation come to this house, forasmuch as he also is the son of Abraham." Publicans, though Jews, were reckoned by





them but as heathens; but now Zaccheus is blessed with faithful Abraham; like him he would command his children and his household to walk in the ways of holy obedience. The salvation of Zaccheus was a specimen of Christ's design in coming into the world, "for the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost."



SYCAMORE TREE.





THE RICH GLUTTON
AND LAZARUS THE BEGGAR.

LUKEXVI.



THE PARABLE OF THE MARRIAGE SUPPER.

ST LUKE XIV





THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO ST. JOHN.

THE FIRST CHAPTER OF ST. JOHN.

Account of John the Evangelist—Christ the Word of God—John the Baptist's Testimony to Christ—Christ the Lamb of God—Nathaniel's Character, and Conjectures about him.

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”

“The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.”—Vers. 1, 19.

The Evangelist John was distinguished as “that disciple whom Jesus loved.” Jesus loved all his disciples, but John was particularly honoured by him, sat near him, and leaned upon his bosom. When Jesus shone in such glory on the “high mountain,” John





was one of the three disciples that saw him. He was, likewise, one of the three that saw his agony in the garden. To him also was committed the care of Mary, the mother of Jesus, when he died on the cross. History informs us that he lived till he was very old, and while the other disciples were martyred, he was suffered to die a natural death.

As we find things in Mark and Luke which are not in Matthew—so we find things in John which are not in either of the other Evangelists.

John does not repeat the account of the birth of Jesus Christ, for that had been sufficiently done by the other three Evangelists; those who followed the first having told us about matters omitted by him, that nothing important might be wanting. And throughout this Evangelist, the history of what Jesus did, is not so much related as what he said.

In the other Evangelists, we are told about the things which Jesus performed, from which we must conclude that he was more than a mere man, for no man could do the miracles which he did; and there are also expressions used at different times which point out that he was a divine person. But John treats more largely on this point, and begins his Gospel by declaring that Jesus Christ is God.

Christ is here called "the Word." I will tell you why: because he it is that speaks all divine things to us; we only know the word of God through him.

He who is called "the Word," is also called God; "and the Word," says John, "was God."

He was "in the beginning;" in the beginning of time, and therefore he was from eternity, before time began. The world was not "in the beginning," as eternity is called, but was from the beginning. The world cannot have existed as this divine Word has existed, because—as is elsewhere said of him—"he was before all things, and by him all things consist." He must have been before the world, because he made the world; for John adds, "All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made." Now, we have seen in Genesis, that "in the beginning God created the heaven and the earth;" so





that it is clear, he who is here called "THE WORD," is the same that is there called God.

John further says, "In him was life;" all living beings derive their life from him, and nobody can give life but God. Men can make a fine statue, but all the men in the world cannot give it life; God alone must do this. But in this divine "Word was life."

"And the Life was the Light of men." The world must have been in gross darkness without him. We could have known nothing about God and the way to heaven, but through Jesus Christ. Where he is not known, even the wisest men did and still do worship carved figures of different materials, believing them to be God. Whole ship loads of these gods have been made in England, and shipped off for one of those nations who use them. If you had gone into the manufactory where they were made, you would have laughed at them as gods; and then if you had thought a little more seriously, you would have pitied the ignorance of the poor creatures who could suppose them to be such;—but if Jesus Christ had never been known to us in his word, and never given us better light, we should have been—as indeed our nation once was—as dark as these poor heathen just alluded to; and, like them, "without God in the world."

This "light shined in darkness, but the darkness comprehended it not." "The world by wisdom knew not God." When Jesus Christ appeared, the world could not see his glory; they were even so blind, that the miracles which proved him to be no mere man, could not convince them.

"There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. The same came for a witness, to bear witness of the light—that all men through him might believe. He"—John—"was not that light, but was sent to bear witness of that light. That was the true light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world." The heathen have the light of reason, and he gave it to them, and we have the light of revelation, or of the gospel revealed—or made known to us—by his Holy Spirit.

"And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us: and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth."





Now think a little on what John has here said. Though his language being about uncommon matters, is expressed in a way not directly to be understood, on account of our being so used chiefly to common concerns ; yet, by a little thought it becomes very clear.

The Word, which spoke the mind of God, and was God ; which made all things, and is the life and light of all men ; was borne witness to by John the Baptist, who came preaching a few months before Jesus openly showed himself in his ministry ; and that " Word " was the Lord Jesus Christ himself, who " was made flesh," when he took our nature, and was born in Bethlehem ; who " dwelt " some time in the world ; whose " glory " the apostles saw—in the deeds he did, in the heavenly truths which he taught, in his transfiguration on the mount, and in his ascension to glory—of which we shall hereafter read.

John attracted much attention, by his bold and singular way of preaching ; and the Jews made inquiries of him if he was the Christ—the Messiah foretold by the prophets. John replied that he was not, that he was only like the forerunner of a prince, in his processions or travels, going before him and saying, " Make straight the way of the Lord ; " remove every impediment out of the way to receive him ; or, as kings' servants say, " Make room." Men must turn out their sins, by repenting of them, and

so make room in their hearts for Jesus Christ. He, who was the Christ, was speedily coming to preach his gospel, and he was far greater than he ; so much so, that he was not worthy of being honoured as his servant, to un-

loose even the straps of his sandals—or shoes without the upper leathers, as worn in the East.

The very next day Jesus made his appearance, and John





pointed to him and said, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world! This is he of whom I said, After me cometh a man which is preferred before me: for he was before me." But why did John call Jesus, "The Lamb of God?" Because he came into the world to die for sinners. Every morning and evening the Jews offered up a Lamb in sacrifice; which sacrifice in the morning took away the guilt of the night; while that of the night took away the guilt of the morning. So God appointed, and so the Jews sacrificed. But Jesus Christ was now to be the Lamb slain. What those lambs did only in type, or as a sign, he came to do in reality, for all, who by faith behold him as "the Lamb of God"—the only Lamb that can take away sin—or, in other words, the only sacrifice that can be truly effectual, and on whose account alone all the old sacrifices were of any use. The Jews would in vain have offered their lambs in sacrifice, if Jesus Christ had not died; and the truly pious Jews believed this, and looked to something more that was to take place when the Messiah should finish his work.

John, moreover, declared that he knew nothing of Christ any more than other people—there was no scheme between them, that he should make out Christ to be the Messiah, for he declared him to be such, because he had seen the Holy Spirit rest upon him in some extraordinary appearance, resembling a meek and innocent dove, yet, at the same time, all glorious and divine. On this account he "bare record," or declared of Christ that he was "the Son of God."

John's disciples, on hearing this testimony, wisely left John, as John wished, and followed after Jesus, and were soon joined by other disciples, which Jesus added to them, to be witnesses of what he said and did.

After this Jesus soon gave his disciples a proof that they had not been mistaken in following him as the true Messiah. Nathanael was invited by Philip to come to Christ, and to follow him; for, said he, "We have found him, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph. And Nathanael said unto him, Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth?" Perhaps he thought that the people of Nazareth were





a bad sort of people, and so he would not believe that even one worth any thing could spring from them : but this was wrong ; we should never condemn many for the faults of a few ; nor suppose, how wicked soever a place may be, that the grace of God may not make it better. Or, perhaps he meant, that the Messiah could not certainly come out of Nazareth, since the prophets had said otherwise ; and he was not then told that, though brought up at Nazareth, he was born at Bethlehem, the very spot pointed out in prophecy for the birth of the Messiah.

However, Nathanael went to Jesus, and when Jesus saw him approaching, he said, "Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no guile !" This was a proof that he was more than a mere man, or how should he have known any thing about Nathanael, whom he had never before seen ? Or, if he had even seen him, how should he know all about his character ? It often takes the wisest men a very long time to find out the character of people. And a very honourable character he gives of Nathanael. Dear young reader, does it belong to you and me ? "Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no guile." By this he meant, that Nathanael did not merely pretend to serve God as an Israelite, but that he served him from his heart. There was no guile or deceit about him, but he was truly sincere.

Nathanael would have been ashamed of this praise, had he not known that he was what our Lord described him to be ; and how much pleasure must he have felt in such a testimony of a good conscience. If any one were to say to you, that you have no guile about you—that you are quite sincere in every thing—would it be correct ? You can best answer.

The good man was, however, surprised at our Lord's knowledge, and asked, "Whence knowest thou me ?" Jesus said, "When thou wast under the fig-tree I saw thee." This was probably some spot where Nathanael retired to meditate and to pray, and where he was so shut out from the world that he knew no eye could possibly see him but the eye of God.

Nathanael needed no further proof that Christ was the Messiah, and so he directly cried out, "Rabbi, thou art the Son of God, thou art the king of Israel." That is, "My Master, thou art a





divine person, thou art the Messiah prophesied of to rule over Israel."

Many suppose Nathanael to have been the same disciple which is called Bartholomew; because Bartholomew being called to be a disciple is never mentioned, and so they think that Nathanael must have been the proper name of Bartholomew, for Bartholomew is not a proper name, but signifies the Son of Ptolemy. The Evangelists who speak of Bartholomew never mention Nathanael; and John, who mentions Nathanael, never mentions Bartholomew; so that it is thought the one name is mentioned for the other; and, lastly, John seems to rank Nathanael among the apostles, when he says, that Peter, Thomas, the two sons of Zebedee, Nathanael, and two other disciples, being going a fishing, Jesus showed himself to them. See the twenty-first chapter and the second verse.

THE SECOND CHAPTER OF ST. JOHN.

Marriage at Cana, in Galilee.

'This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth his glory; and his disciples believed on him.'

—Ver. 11.

We have here an account of the first of Christ's public miracles, which he performed at a marriage feast at Cana in Galilee, to which he and his disciples were invited, and his mother Mary was also there.

There being more guests than were probably at first expected, the wine was soon drunk out. Mary mentioned the circumstance to Jesus. Some think that Mary, having seen him perform some miracles in private, she now expected to see him perform another by supplying the wine. And they suppose this, because Mary could have no other reason for mentioning it to him than that he should take notice of it, and because he checked her for intimating it to him, probably to induce him to work a miracle. "Jesus





saith unto her, Woman, what have I to do with thee? mine hour"—that is, my time for working any miracle here—"is not yet come." I wish you just to observe, by the way, that this language seems rather rude, and for us to say to any one, but especially to a mother, "Woman," would show a very great want of respect; but it was a manner of speaking which in that society implied no rudeness, for even princes addressed ladies of rank in the same way, and servants employed the same word to speak to their mistresses; just as gentlemen address a lady among us as *Madam*, or a servant by the same word shortened into *Ma'am*.

His mother left him to perform his own pleasure, and told the servants just to mind what he should say, if he gave them any orders.

Now there were six stone water-pots there, which had been used for water for various purposes, especially for purifying or washing the hands and feet, and the cups and platters. These water-pots, or jars, learned men have reckoned, from the size of the measures used at that time, to have held about fifty-four gallons. "Jesus saith unto them, Fill the water-pots with water. And they filled them up to the brim. And he saith unto them, Draw out now, and bear unto the governor of the feast. And they bare it." When the governor had tasted the wine, he was delighted with it, but did not know from whence it came; so he said to the bridegroom, "Every man at the beginning doth set forth good wine, and when men have well drunk, then that which is worse"—because the taste is not then so delicate; "but thou hast kept the good wine until now."

There is a story related of Dryden, the poet, that when he was a boy at school, he showed a very fine genius; and, having one day neglected his task, or committed some other fault, his master told him he should escape punishment, if he could manage to relate the miracle at Cana in Galilee in one line; and that he immediately replied—

"The modest water saw its God and blushed."

I have seen the same thought expressed in four lines by Aaron Hill, another writer of the last century, but I give you the one line, which is very beautiful, and worth your remembering.







CHRIST AND THE WOMAN OF SAMARIA.



THE THIRD CHAPTER OF ST. JOHN.

Christ's Conversation with Nicodemus.

"Ye must be born again."—Ver. 7.

In this chapter we have an interesting conversation which our Lord held with Nicodemus, one of the sect of the Pharisees, and "a ruler of the Jews;" that is, a member of the great Sanhedrim—a sort of legislature, consisting of seventy-one or seventy-two members, and consequently he was one of considerable authority in Jerusalem; though this legislature was perhaps now somewhat altered in its character, and allowed only to meddle with matters about the Jewish church, the government being under the Romans.

Nicodemus being afraid of incurring the displeasure of the Jews, by going to see Jesus, went to him "by night." He respectfully addressed him by the name which the Jewish Doctors bore, and called him "Rabbi," by way of distinction. He told him he believed him to be "a teacher sent from God," and that he had given proof of it, by the miracles which he had wrought, and which no common person could do.

Jesus replied, that this was not enough to save him, but he must be "born again;" that is, born anew; in other words, he must undergo as great a change in his heart, as if his old life had been all past away, and he came anew into the world. He must be quite a different creature from what he had been. He was born in sin, but he must be born of the Holy Spirit, or he could never enter heaven.

Nicodemus could not understand him; but Christ told him not to "marvel," or wonder, at what he said; for as the wind blew which way it would, never seen by our eyes, yet felt in its power upon our bodies, so the Divine Spirit works unseen, yet powerfully felt on the heart of the sinner, before he can be saved. So, that as by nature he cannot love God, now by grace he loves him;





as by nature he practises sin, so by grace he practises holiness; as by nature he delights in folly, so by grace he delights in that which is good. This change of the mind is great as a new birth, for none can understand it, but those who have felt it; and those who have felt it, know that they are "born again," are "new creatures in Christ Jesus."

Hence we find persons of rank, and learning, and sense—persons who are wise in every other respect—often have no idea of what is meant by being "born again." At most, they think it may signify a change from the Jewish to the Christian religion; and so they see no need of any change being wrought upon them, since they have, as they suppose, been born Christians. Some even suppose that being baptized is being born again; but, my dear young readers, use your own common sense upon the matter. Think what could be our Lord's meaning. Had he meant nothing more than a change of his religion, Nicodemus would not have been so foolish as to ask, "How can these things be?" because there was nothing puzzling in such a change as that; it had taken place in many, who had left the Jews, and become disciples of Christ. No, he meant a very great change indeed. A man may change his religion, and yet his heart remain unchanged; so it was with Judas Iscariot, who betrayed Jesus. Many called Christians are very bad men, and women, and children, too, though they have been baptized. Do you think that such are fit for heaven?—that hypocrites, and swearers, and liars, and unclean persons, and sabbath-breakers, and persons of the like description, are fit to join the holy in heaven? Think! what then could our blessed Teacher mean when he said, "Ye must be born again?"

Are you born again? Our blessed Saviour says very solemnly to Nicodemus—and what he says to him must apply to us all—"Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God;" that is, Except the Spirit of God purify our nature, as if it were washed clean by water, we cannot enter under the dominion of the blessed God, which must begin here, and continues for ever in the bright world above.





In this discourse Jesus teaches Nicodemus many other important things. To be born again, implies to have spiritual life; now as the body cannot see natural things, till it be born, so neither can the soul see spiritual things, till it be "born of the Spirit. So then that which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." A natural man sees nothing beyond natural things, and these he may know in the highest degree; but it is only the spiritual man that can understand spiritual things. Some of these Christ points out to Nicodemus. If he is born again, he must, as an act of spiritual life, believe in Jesus; in other words, see, and seeing, trust in him as a Saviour. For, as when the children of Israel were bitten by the fiery serpents in the wilderness, and Moses, by the Divine command, made a serpent of brass and set it upon a pole, that the eyes of the poor sufferers looking towards it, in obedience to God's command, might live; so is Jesus exhibited to poor sinners, wounded by sin, with bites far worse than those of the fiery serpents—that, looking earnestly to him with the mind, and trusting in him for the curing of their souls, by the removal of their defilement and guilt, through the virtues of his precious blood, shed for sinners, they may not die, but live for ever. This is the meaning of the words, "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up; that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life."

Our Lord then goes on to say, that those who do not believe in him can have no pardon, but are in a state of condemnation. As they have no Saviour to trust in, no one to stand in their stead, or plead their cause, they must in that condition perish. Christ has come into the world, to shine upon it in its miserable and ignorant state, just as the sun breaking through the clouds brightens up the day, or rising in the morning dispels the night; but men love darkness,—they are so mad and thoughtless, that they prefer remaining in their spiritual ignorance and misery, rather than to come by faith to Jesus, and to commit their souls into his care, to be both ruled and comforted by his gospel. The reason of this is, that "their deeds are evil,"—they love to practice their sins better than to go to Christ, for they are quite aware





that they cannot give themselves up to Christ, and give themselves up to sin at the same time; and so they rashly cleave to their sin, and depart from Jesus. How many are there in the world so infatuated! Do you, dear young reader, love sin and the world, rather than Christ?—then you “love darkness rather than light,” and “your deeds are evil.”

THE FOURTH CHAPTER OF ST. JOHN.

The Woman of Samaria—The Nobleman's Son cured.

“This is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world.”—Verse 2.

There is a very pleasing little narrative in this chapter, about a woman of Samaria. She lived at a city called Sychar: Jacob formerly had purchased a piece of ground here, and gave it to his beloved son Joseph; and here was a well, which still bore the name of Jacob's well.

Jesus having occasion to pass that way on a journey, being hungry, thirsty, and fatigued, sat down by this well. Just at the moment the woman of Samaria went to it to draw water, and Jesus asked her to give him some to drink. The woman wondered at such a request from Jesus, he being a Jew, and the Jews and Samaritans having a very bitter dislike to each other; for the Samaritans had in various ways endeavoured to injure the Jews. Jesus then said to her, “If thou knewest the gift of God”—that is, that God has given his own Son to save lost men of every nation—“and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink, thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water;” by this he meant the Holy Spirit's influences, which, because they are refreshing to the thirsty soul of man, in search of peace and happiness, are often compared to water.

The woman did not understand him, and asked him how he could draw water elsewhere, having neither well nor pitcher at





hand ; and if he thought himself wiser than Jacob, who had drunk the water of that well, and left it as a valuable gift to his family.

Jesus told her, that those who partook of that water would grow thirsty again, but that which he could bestow would afford full and everlasting satisfaction.

Still the woman could not comprehend his meaning, and either supposing he might know of some extraordinary water, or might be boasting of what he could not give, she proposed putting him to the test, and said, "Sir, give me of this water that I thirst not, neither come hither to draw."

Jesus then began a conversation which convinced her that he was no common man, and told her all about her private concerns.

She then said, "Sir, I perceive that thou art a prophet;" and not liking to talk about some things which she had wrongly done, she asked him to inform her, which place of worship was most pleasing to God, that in which the Samaritans worshipped on Mount Gerizim, or that in which the Jews worshipped at Jerusalem.

Jesus told her, that the time was now coming when no one place in particular should be more holy than another, but every spot would be the same in the sight of God, in which the worshippers were sincere ; for "God is a spirit, and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth."

The woman further answered him, that she believed what he said was right ; but the Messiah was expected soon to come, and then he would clear up all difficulties about the matter.

Imagine how surprised the woman must have been, when Jesus said, "I that speak unto thee am he." The disciples, however, who were gone away to buy food, now returned, and so the conversation ended.

Seeing Jesus talking with a Samaritan woman, the disciples were quite amazed ; but they would not take the liberty of asking Jesus why he did so.

In the mean time the woman leaving her water-pot, hastened to the city, and told all her acquaintance there that she had seen the Messiah ; for a person she had talked with had told her the most wonderful things ; and they must come along with her, and see and hear him too.





While this was taking place the disciples begged of Jesus to eat of the food they had brought; but he said, "I have meat to eat that ye know not of;" and his mind was so intent on his work of doing good, which he called his meat, that he cared not about eating. The disciples, however, were often dull of understanding, and so they were now, for they thought that he had got some other meat, and wondered how he could have procured it. Jesus then explained to them his meaning: "My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work." It wanted then four months of harvest-time, but he nevertheless had a great harvest to gather in—not of barley, but of souls. It was not a time then to eat and to drink, but to work; for the Samaritans were ready to receive him and to believe on him, and these were his precious fields, which were white and ready for harvest. And so it came to pass, for "many of the Samaritans of that city believed on him."

Having been prevailed upon to stop at Sychar two days, he then proceeded on his journey into Galilee; and going again to Cana, "where he made the water wine," he performed another miracle by curing the sick son of a nobleman of Herod's court. This nobleman, hearing that Jesus was there, took a journey from Capernaum to see him, and to implore him to cure his son. Jesus knew how unbelieving the people of Capernaum were, and perhaps that he had been so among others, so he reproved him, and did not say he would cure his son, but told him, "Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe." The nobleman, however, urged him to return with him and save his child. The kind heart of Jesus could not resist the yearnings of the fond parent over his beloved son, and he said, "Go thy way, thy son liveth." The nobleman relied on his word, and hastened home. But before he got home some of the servants were sent on the road to meet him, and to tell him the joyful news, that his son was recovered; and on his inquiring at what time it took place, he found it was exactly at the time which Jesus had said.

Owing to this remarkable miracle, the second which Jesus performed at Cana, not only did the nobleman believe, but all his family were convinced that Jesus was the true Messiah; that is, "THE CHRIST, the Saviour of the world."





THE FIFTH CHAPTER OF ST. JOHN.

Christ cures the disabled Man at the Pool of Bethesda.

"The man departed and told the Jews that it was Jesus that had made him whole."—Ver. 15.

We here still find Jesus doing good. What a pleasure must his generous heart have felt in thus relieving the miserable; and though we cannot cure the sick and the lame, yet if we are kind and compassionate towards them, we shall in a degree partake of something of the pleasure which our divine Lord felt.

We now behold Jesus going, according to custom, and in obedience to the law, to the feast of the passover at Jerusalem, on which occasion a vast number of persons being assembled, he had the greater opportunity of doing good.

There was at Jerusalem a pool, which, on account of some medical properties in its waters, was a sort of bath, to which persons with complaints of various kinds went, in order to obtain a cure, and many had been cured by bathing in it. It seems, however, that it was necessary they should go in just at a certain time, when the waters were agitated by an extraordinary cause.

Jesus arriving at the pool, saw a poor man there who had been disabled during no less than thirty-eight years, and having no money to pay any one to wait upon him and put him into the water whenever it began to stir, some other person always hurried into the pool before him just at the proper moment, and obtained cure instead of himself.

Jesus talked to him about his complaint, and learning his hard lot, asked him if he would like then to be cured; and then he commanded him to take up his bed and walk. We have noticed a similar cure in the ninth chapter of St. Matthew, and there told you, that the bed used was a sort of mattress, or we may add, if you have ever seen a sailor's hammock, it was something of that kind, so that a man in health could carry it without any great inconvenience.





It was enough for Jesus to speak and the cure was at once effected, so the man took up his bed and went away.

This happened on the Sabbath-day. Now the Jews were very strict observers of the Sabbath, and so far they were right; and they would not allow any one to carry a burden on that day. So seeing this man carrying his bed, they told him that he was breaking the Sabbath. The man then excused himself for what he was doing, and intimated as much as that he could not in that instance be doing wrong, for he who had power to cure him had certainly a right to order him to carry his bed. The poor man could not afford to lose it, he was not going to leave it by the pool, and as he did not carry it for the purpose of business, but only in a case of entire necessity, all works of necessity and mercy are lawful on the Sabbath.

These were probably Pharisees, who, guessing that it was Jesus who cured this man, endeavoured thus to prejudice him, for they took every opportunity to show their hatred to our divine Lord.

Jesus afterwards met the man in the temple, and he told him to sin no more, lest a worse evil should overtake him. He had probably been a notorious sinner, and brought disease on his body by leading a bad life, as drunkards and many others do; our Lord, therefore, warned him against returning to his evil habits. All God's acts of comfort towards us, in curing the diseases of our bodies or our minds, should be regarded by us as notices from God to love and serve him, and habitually and wilfully to sin no more. Remember this, my dear reader, when God chastises you by affliction, it is very thoughtless and obstinate, and awfully wicked to return to sin; and when he bestows comforts upon you, it is ungrateful in the extreme to break his holy laws and offend against him.

The man, finding that it was Jesus who had cured him, went and told the Jews, hoping, no doubt, that they would raise the fame of his divine Saviour; instead of which these wicked people only hated him the more, and sought to kill him by bringing him before their Sanhedrim or court of justice, to have him condemned for breaking the Sabbath.

It is thought by some, that what follows in this chapter, was





spoken in the temple by Jesus, in vindication of what he had done; but some are of opinion that he was taken before the Sanhedrim, and that it was his defence there. In this beautiful defence, he declared that he was the Son of God, working in all he did with God; that his mission to mankind was from heaven, and that none could be saved who did not believe in him. His works were proofs that he was no common person; and if they had read their Scriptures aright, they would have found that he was the true Messiah.

Notwithstanding his forcible arguments, their hard hearts still hated him, and at nothing did they feel more mortified, than that he should make himself equal with God, and require "that all men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father." On this account they still sought to kill him.

It does not, however, appear that they then did more than vent their hatred in their looks and words, for we find Jesus again at liberty, and proceeding in his work.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER OF ST. JOHN.

Christ Compares Himself to Bread.

"For the bread of God is He which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world."—Ver. 33.

In this chapter is recorded the miracle of Christ's feeding the multitude, of which we read in the fourteenth chapter of St. Matthew.

The people were so delighted with this miracle, that they followed him from Tiberias, across the water to Capernaum. Here he took occasion to tell them, that he knew they sought only their own gratification in following him, and that their motive was wrong; they thought to make themselves rich and great by following him, but they were mistaken. He then told them to labour not so much for the body as to forget to feed their souls: that to do this





TIBERIAS.

they must believe on him. They ungratefully replied, that if he would rain manna from heaven they would. Jesus replied, that his Father had sent them bread from heaven—the bread of life: they asked to be fed with it; but, for the most part, they neither understood what Jesus meant by it, nor desired it, thinking only of a good supply for their bodies. Then Jesus said, “I am the bread of life.” Yes, my dear young reader, those who believe in him find life for their souls. Bread sustains the body, and Christ only can sustain the soul, and it is by faith that we thus feed upon Christ. Food is not more delightful to the hungry than Christ is to the believer.

The Jews were not pleased at what Christ now said, and he let them know that he was acquainted with their thoughts concerning him, and that such was their prejudice against him, that nothing





less than a divine power could overcome it; and, indeed, it is so with us all; there is a natural backwardness in us to receive and to love Jesus. This is no excuse, for we ought to love him; there is every thing in him to make him lovely; but unless God, by his grace, touches our hearts, we are all like the Jews, and will not eat of this living bread, "that is, believe in Jesus."

Many of Christ's followers, finding they were mistaken in gratifying their unworthy ends, now left him, "and walked no more with him."

"Then Jesus said unto the twelve, Will ye also go away?" Surely you know better than to leave me, but I want none but willing followers. Go, if you will. Peter directly answered for all the rest: "Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life; and we believe, *and are sure*, that thou art that Christ"—that Messiah—"the Son of the living God."

Peter and the twelve were not alone in this belief. Many thousands, and tens of thousands, have believed and do so believe in Jesus; they know from what is related of him, on the best authority, and from what they feel in their own hearts by trusting in him, that he is "the Christ," the only Saviour.

THE SEVENTH, EIGHTH, AND NINTH CHAPTERS OF ST. JOHN.

Christ the Spring or Fountain of Happiness—The accused Woman—The Jews try to stone Christ—Christ gives Sight to a Man born Blind.

"As he spake these words, many believed on him."—Chap. viii. 13.

Jesus now left the province of Judea for that of Galilee; for while he remained in Jewry, or Judea, "the Jews sought to kill him;" but he soon afterwards returned thither at the feast of tabernacles, when all the males went to Jerusalem, and when the Jews erected tents, or booths, in which they dwelt and ate their meals, in commemoration of the Israelites dwelling in booths in the wilderness. Here Christ went into the temple and taught the





people; and they wondered at the divine truths which he told them. He also repeated his reproofs to the Jews, and they still tried to get a favourable opportunity to kill him, but they could not then do it. And in the last great and solemn day of the feast, he stood up and cried aloud, "If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink." You understand what you have read about the woman at the well; Christ here means the same, that all true life proceeds from him; and that if any man wished then to be happy, by coming to him he could make him so; from him he could always be supplied, as a thirsty man could from an overflowing spring; he should be brimful of happiness, which he expresses by saying, that "out of his belly" should "flow rivers of living waters." Springs make rivers, and the more plentiful the springs, the larger or more numerous the rivers. Thus his very heart and soul should abound with comfort and joy, always flowing like a fresh spring, and not like waters that might be dried.

In the following chapter a woman was brought to him who had forsaken her husband and lived with another man. This was forbidden by the laws of God, and was to be punished with death. The Jews brought this woman to Christ, that he might say whether she ought to be punished or not. Now, if he had said that she ought, they would have accused him to the Sanhedrim and to the Roman government, of taking upon himself to sit in judgment without any authority, which would have been a high crime; and if he had said she was not punishable, they would have accused him of contradicting the law of Moses. In both cases, therefore, they would have taken an advantage of him; but with his usual wonderful wisdom, he defeated their design, and instead of answering their question for his opinion, he said, "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her." Jesus knew that her accusers were as wicked as she, and this answer made them quite ashamed of themselves: so they all slunk away one by one, leaving the woman with Christ, who faithfully and tenderly admonished her to "go and sin no more."

Jesus still continued to exhort in the temple, and pointed to





himself as "the light of the world," and "many believed on him." He also further reproved the Jews, who became so enraged with what he said to them, and especially when he spoke of his own eternal residence as the Son of God, that they took up stones with which some builders were repairing the temple, that they might throw them at him; but Jesus escaped again from their hands, for his work on earth was not yet done.

And as Jesus passed by from the temple, he saw a man who was born blind; and he wet some clay with his spittle, and putting it on his eyes, commanded him to go to the pool of Siloam and wash there. The man accordingly obeyed him, "and washed, and came seeing."

Now, the putting of clay on the man's eyes could not give him sight, nor could the washing in the fountain called Siloam; but this was done to show us that we ought never to despise the use of any means, how simple soever they may seem, if those means are divinely commanded. Praying to God, and hearing and reading the word of God, can never save our souls; but they are all means which we are commanded to use, and in using them, with a dependence upon God's grace, he is pleased to give his blessing.

This miracle attracted much notice, for the man was a public beggar, and every body knew him, and now every body asked, "Is not this he that sat and begged?" Then the people wished to learn in what wonderful way he had got his sight; and he told them. The Pharisees also soon heard about it, and they were also very inquisitive in the matter. The man told them the same story. Now this miracle, like that of curing the impotent man, was done on the Sabbath-day; and being still full of malice against Jesus, these wicked Pharisees said, that though Jesus might have cured the man, yet nevertheless he was a bad man, for he had broken the Sabbath. Some few, however, thought differently, and they quarrelled among themselves about it. As for the blind man, he made up his mind at once that Jesus was a prophet; for he knew that no common person could do what he had done.





The Pharisees then sent for the man's parents, to know if he had really been born blind; or if so, whether perhaps some means had not been used to cure him, to which they might ascribe his cure rather than to Jesus. The parents were as much surprised as the Pharisees, but as they knew nothing about the cure, they were obliged to set them again inquiring of the man; and besides, had they known more about it, they were afraid to say what they thought of Jesus, for the Pharisees had threatened severely to punish any who should own that he was the true Messiah; they were liable to be put out of the synagogue, which was a sentence that did not exclude them from going to the synagogue, but was only so called. It was, however, very severe. After this sentence no one durst hire the punished person to work, no one durst trade with him, and his goods were confiscated, or taken away from him.

The Pharisees again, therefore, spoke to the man who was cured, and told him to praise God for it, and not Jesus, for he was no more than a sinner. But the man thought more highly of him. He who had opened his eyes had thrown some light of knowledge into his mind, and given him to see, that he was no sinful creature who had cured him. And after disputing their opinion, he at once asked them if they would become disciples of Jesus. This was more than their malicious and proud spirits could bear, and they then reviled him and Christ too. The man, however, reasoned well with them, and said, it was very strange indeed that they could not see differently into Christ's character, for it was plain enough, that by no human power he could have opened his eyes; "Since the world began was it not heard that any man opened the eyes of one that was born blind."

Being unable any longer to reason the point, they had recourse to violence, and they said, "Dost thou dare to teach us?" and so they cast him out of the synagogue.

In this pitiable condition the Saviour sought for him and found him; and he said to him, "Dost thou believe in the Son of God?" that is, Dost thou expect the Messiah? Wilt thou trust in him? for in the prophecies he was called the Son of God. The poor man's heart was made ready to receive Christ's instructions, and





JACOB'S WELL.





he said, "Who is he, Lord, that I may believe in him?" Jesus then told him that he himself was the Son of God, and the man worshipped him.

THE TENTH CHAPTER OF ST. JOHN.

Christ compares himself to a Door—Christ the Good Shepherd.

"I am the door."—"I am the good Shepherd."—Vers. 9, 11

This is still a continuation of our Lord's conversation at the temple, at the time that the blind man received his sight; for though it is here divided into chapters, for the convenience of our reading it in smaller portions, it was not formerly so.

We find Christ here comparing himself to a door, through which it was necessary to enter properly into a sheepfold; for any one climbing over into it did so from bad designs, he was a thief and a robber. We have doors of entrance to our houses, and none but thieves and robbers think of getting into them by climbing up to the windows.

The allusion was well understood by the Jews. The sheepfold was "an inclosure, sometimes in the manner of a building, and made of stone, and sometimes was fenced with reeds, and in it was a large door, at which the shepherd went in and out when he led in or brought out the sheep."

Now the real shepherd would always enter in by that door, that is, by the proper way, and the man who watched the door inside, and watched the sheep there, would always open the door on hearing his voice. The sheep too would directly know him, when he called them by name; for in eastern countries the shepherds know their sheep as we know our dogs, and they give them names, and when they are called, they will come to the shepherd out of the flock, and answer to their names, as a dog we know will answer us. With the same familiarity they would also follow their shepherd, who frequently, in old times, went before them, playing some musical instrument. But if a stranger attempted to lead them, they took fright at the sound of his voice, and ran away.





By the sheepfold Christ meant his Church, to which he was the only way of entrance; and he tells the Pharisees and people, that whoever before claimed to be the Messiah had deceived them, for he alone was the Saviour of the world; therefore he alone that went in and out of this fold, under his guidance, would find happiness and peace.

Again Christ says, "I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep." So you read that David exposed his life, and fought with wild beasts to save his father's flock. Christ our good shepherd, actually gave himself up to death that his sheep might not perish, unlike the hireling, that cares not for them; and if his life is endangered by protecting them, hastily flees and leaves them to the devouring wolf.

Thus he loved his church, and gave himself for it. Among the Jews he had many sheep, whom he came to save; but not among them only, but also among the Gentiles—among the heathen, that is, the nations that were not Jews, of which we form a part. Jesus further says, "And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold and one Shepherd."

The temple was profaned by Antiochus, who sacrificed a sow in the holy of holies, of which you have read in the account I have given you of the History of the Jews, between the time recorded in the Old and New Testaments. The Jews, therefore, held a feast of dedication, which was appointed by Judas Maccabæus and his brethren, on account of the purging of it, and renewing the altar. The next account given us of Jesus is, that he was at this dedication, and walking in a porch of the temple, called Solomon's porch—for this porch "was covered over, and the outside of it was inclosed with a wall, which made it very convenient for such a purpose." Here again the Jews assailed him, and wanted Jesus to own that he was the Messiah, that they might find a ground for putting him to death as an impostor.

We have here the answer of Jesus to them, leaving them to judge by his deeds, whether or not he was the Messiah: "The works that I do in my Father's name, they bear witness of me."

Once more the Saviour escaped from an attempt of the Jews to





stone or take him, "and went away beyond Jordan into the place where John at first baptized, and there he abode." "And many believed on him there."

THE ELEVENTH, TWELFTH, THIRTEENTH, AND FOURTEENTH CHAPTERS
OF ST. JOHN.

*Christ raises Lazarus from the dead—Christ comforts his Disciples
by promising his Holy Spirit.*

"This man doeth many miracles."—Chap. xi. 47.

"And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; even the Spirit of truth."—Chap. xiv. 16, 17.

At a village called Bethany, about two miles from Jerusalem, there lived two sisters, Martha and Mary, of whom we have read in the tenth chapter of Luke. They had a brother named Lazarus, and he seemed to have been an excellent man, for Jesus loved him, as he did also Martha and her sister, who were pious women.

Lazarus was taken ill, and his sisters sent unto him, saying, "Lord, behold, he whom thou lovest is sick." But Jesus delayed going to see him, till he was dead. This he did that he might try the faith of his sisters, and see if they really believed in his divine power to raise him again; and also that he might perform another miracle, to confirm the faith of his disciples.

When Jesus arrived at Bethany, Lazarus had lain in the grave four days; and there were many Jews at the house of his friends, comforting the bereaved sisters. As soon as Martha heard that he was coming, she hastened out to meet him, and perhaps to warn him, in case he might consider himself in danger from the Jews. Mary continued a mourner in the house, for she did not know that Jesus had arrived, and she had a most sincere love for him.

Martha complained, "Lord, if thou hadst been here, my bro





ther had not died." This proved how high an opinion she had of his power to save him ; and she seems to have had faith enough, to believe it possible that he might raise him from the dead.

After some further conversation with Jesus, Martha hastened to call her sister, who suddenly leaving the house, was supposed by the Jews to have gone to weep over her brother's grave, according to a frequent custom—and so they followed her.

As soon as Mary came to Jesus, she also said as her sister had said, " Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died ;" showing by this, that she had the same belief in his power. The blessed Jesus, who had all the feelings of our nature, was tenderly touched at the affecting scene, and going to his sepulchre, " Jesus wept." Oh, the kindness of his heart ! Who could but love him !

Some of the Jews, who did not like him, reasoned wisely enough, and said, that since he had opened the eyes of the blind, surely he might as easily raise the dead ; but they said this, in order to raise a doubt whether he ever had done such a thing in reality, as made the blind to see.

Jesus now went to the cave, in which, according to a custom of the Jews, the body was placed, " and a stone lay upon it," or rather upon the mouth of the cave. Jesus immediately desired the stone to be removed, and " cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth. And he that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with grave-clothes ;" having several folds of linen wrapped about him, which was another custom of those times, " and his face was bound about with a napkin," that is, round the forehead, and under the chin. Jesus then said to the persons at the grave, " Loose him, and let him go."

This miracle made many more Jews believe in Christ ; but some remained so astonishingly obstinate, that still they would not believe he was the Messiah ; and being filled with hatred to him because he was becoming so popular, they went and told the Pharisees, probably that they might adopt more crafty or active means to take him and put him to death.

The Pharisees were more alarmed than ever, and began seriously to think what it was most wise to do, to prevent the people from becoming the disciples of Jesus. They acknowledged that he did





many miracles, and that if he proceeded in this manner, all men would believe in him. This was a reason why they themselves should have believed in him, as the promised Messiah; but it showed the blindness of their hearts that they did not.

“Jesus, therefore, walked no more openly among the Jews,” at or near Jerusalem; he did not teach in their streets, nor work miracles, nor appear in public company; but went and resided in a little and obscure city called Ephraim.

Most of the remainder of John's Gospel is a repetition of facts mentioned by the other evangelists; only this evangelist gives us some of his conversations and discourses which they did not.

In the thirteenth and fourteenth chapters, we have his discourse with his disciples, after supper, when he had convicted and cast off the wicked Judas, and when their hearts were very sorrowful at what he had said about leaving them. It is one of the finest proofs of the Saviour's kind and affectionate heart; and in it he bids them to look for another Comforter when he should have returned to his Father; by that Comforter he meant the Holy Spirit, who should abide with them for ever. That Spirit now dwells in all believers, and they feel his gracious and comforting influences on their minds. How he dwells in them no one can explain, any more than we can explain how the soul dwells in the body; but we know, and are sure that it does, for the body would be dead without the soul; or if it could live by any common principle of animal life, such as beasts possess, yet it could not reason and think without the soul. Believers feel that they have the Holy Spirit abiding in them, by the holy principles he gives them, and by the holy desires and habits they contract; and by the hopes and joys and comforts they possess; all of which are quite of another nature from what they had before the Holy Spirit took possession of their hearts. Thousands and tens of thousands who believe in Jesus, all have these same feelings and influences more or less. So that they are not mere wild notions taken up by a few enthusiastic people, but persons of different constitutions, young and old, learned and unlearned, of all countries, climes, and colours, who believe in Jesus, have evidently the





same Holy Spirit, the Comforter, taking possession of their hearts, and dwelling there. The words of Jesus to his disciples, spoken in this beautiful discourse, are, therefore, fulfilling every day.

Worldly people who do not love Christ, but who love and follow sin, and worldly enjoyments, and pleasures, laugh at these truths, and do not believe them, because they know nothing of them, just as a dead body cannot know any thing about the life of the living; but when God gives spiritual life to the soul, then he who never knew any thing about the comforting and holy influences of the Holy Spirit the Comforter before, is no more a stranger to them, but feels as other believers feel. "If ye love me," says Jesus, "keep my commandments; and I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him, for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you."

THE FIFTEENTH CHAPTER OF ST. JOHN.

The Parable of the Vine and Branches.

"I am the Vine, ye are the branches."—Ver. 5.

Christ here speaks the parable of the Vine. The wine which had just been drunk at supper with his disciples, afforded our divine Lord an opportunity of comparing himself with it. He had said he was Bread and Living Water, to them that believed on him; and now he says, "I am the true Vine." He also compares his Father to the Husbandman.

You know that most of the wines, and all those which were drunk at this supper, were made of the fruit of the vine—that is, the grape. Christ compares himself to the vine, because he wished to show his disciples how closely by faith they were united to him. He therefore compares them to branches; and he says, "Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away; and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring





forth more fruit." Fruit is that which the tree produces of any real value. Now, in like manner as the branch united to the vine is expected to bring forth fruit, so those who are by faith united to Jesus Christ, are expected to bring forth their fruits. What these fruits are, we may learn from the like expressions in other parts of the sacred Scriptures—"fruits meet for repentance—fruits unto holiness—the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus to the praise and glory of God."

Now, if we profess to belong to Christ, and do not bear these fruits, we are cut off as the husbandman cuts off the useless or withered branch; for we have no proper union with him, and receive no more life from him, than a withered branch does from the tree. And if we belong to Christ, and really are his disciples from the heart, yet his heavenly Father purges the branches of the true vine. By purging is here meant pruning. The vine is taken much care of in the East. It is of great importance there, because it furnishes refreshing drink. Its grapes are very large indeed, and full of fine juice. But in a wild state it would not produce in this manner. All this fruitfulness is effected by cultivation; and if it have too many branches, the fruit becomes weakened; for the fewer the branches, the more juices the root sends up into those which remain, and the stronger the fruit which they yield. For this reason the knife is freely used to cut off the superfluous branches which are not likely to bring forth good fruit.

You must recollect all this is merely the language of comparison; that is, "like as the husbandman prunes the vine, my heavenly Father will prune you who are my disciples:" and by pruning, cleansing, or purging, the vine, as it is here called, we are taught that there is much in us that requires often to be removed, even if we are Christ's real disciples; and it is chiefly by afflictions that God will prune us, so that we must not wonder when good people suffer under trials—they are the pruning-knives which purge or take away the branches that are useless.

Christ proceeds, urging that his disciples should therefore abide closely in him, living by faith on him as the Son of God, cleaving with all their hearts to him; and he tells them, "as the branch





cannot bear fruit of itself except it abide in the vine : no more can ye, except ye abide in me." He further says, that those who abide in him bring forth "much fruit;" and this abiding in him, is the very reason; for the branch now derives nourishment from the root—the believer thus draws strength from Christ—for he continues, "without me ye can do nothing." This is the reason why we read about Christ—hear about Christ—talk about Christ—think about Christ—and pray to Christ, that our minds may more and more be full of Christ, and so that we may get fresh supplies from him, as the branch does from the root of the tree.

And then he tells us of the awful fate of those that are not in him, or do not continue in him; those who never have believed in him, or have only made a profession of it, but have not believed in reality: "If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned." The dried and separated wood is only fit for fuel, a dreadful emblem of the condition of those who are only fit for eternal burnings. Let us then bear on our memories our Lord's concluding exhortation: "Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples."

THE SIXTEENTH CHAPTER OF ST. JOHN TO THE END.

Christ commits his Mother Mary to the care of John—His certain Death from the Soldier piercing his Side—His Appearances after his Resurrection.

- "And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book.
"But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God, and that believing ye might have life through his name."—Chap. xxi. 30, 31.

We have now gone through the principal passages of the four Evangelists: a few things only remain in John of which it may be necessary that we should take a short notice.





THE ASCENSION.



CHRIST APPEARS TO MARY.



The first is in the *nineteenth chapter, and twenty-fifth and following verses*. We here learn that three Marys stood by the cross of Jesus when he was nailed upon it, and dying with his crucifixion: Mary his mother—Mary his mother's sister, who was the wife of Cleophas—and Mary Magdalene. As for our sakes the blessed Jesus became poor, he had nothing to leave his mother; and as Joseph was without doubt now dead, and she was getting old, he was affectionately concerned for her, that she should not want for comfort and support in her last days. This, I think, is a most lovely trait in the character of Jesus. Though he was then in the deepest agony of body on the cross, he forgot his pains to think on his poor afflicted mother. He therefore commended her to the care of his beloved disciple, John. "Woman," said he,—and you remember that I have before told you, that this name, so spoken, was a title of respect—"behold thy son!" as much as to say, "I am going away from earth, and thou canst therefore have this body with thee no longer, but look upon John as thy son; and I know the kindness of his heart, that for my sake he will love thee, and treat thee as a son." And then he said to John, "Behold thy mother;" meaning, "behave towards her as a son; take care of her; comfort her in her old age." "Christ," says Mr. Henry, "has here taught children to the utmost of their power to provide for the comfort of their aged parents. When David was in distress, he took care of his parents, and found out a shelter for them." Some writers say that Mary lived with John at Jerusalem eleven years, and then died; and others say that she lived longer, and removed with him to Ephesus; but the Scripture gives us no more information on this subject. Jesus knew that John loved him, and would therefore obey him; and no doubt but he behaved towards her as a kind son to the day of her death.

In the *thirty-first and following verses* of the same chapter, we also read some particulars respecting the crucifixion of the blessed Jesus which are not mentioned by the other Evangelists. "The Jews, therefore, because it was the preparation, that the bodies should not remain upon the cross on the Sabbath-day (for that Sabbath-day was an high day), besought Pilate that their legs





might be broken, and that they might be taken away." It was now the preparation time for the Sabbath-day, which at the period of the Passover was a grand festival—it was one of the days of unleavened bread, and some reckon, the day of the offering of the first-fruits. The Jews were therefore afraid of a breach of the law on that day; for, according to the Jewish law, Deut. xxi. 22, 23, the body of one that was hanged on a tree, was not to remain all night, but to be taken down that day and buried. Among the Romans the carcasses remained to be eaten by birds; but the Jews were taught to consider them as defiling the land, and viewed it as still more shocking for such a thing to take place on their sacred Sabbath.

Now, this circumstance led to a certain proof that Jesus had really died for us on the cross; a fact very important, or when he rose from the grave, it might have been said, that he was not then dead, and so it was no resurrection, but only a recovery from the faintness occasioned by his sufferings.

Tho Jews took care that the bodies should not be taken down alive, and that the criminals should not escape, so to hurry their death, they used to break their legs: and this they now begged permission of Pilate to do. "But when they came to Jesus, and saw that he was dead already, they brake not his legs. But one of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side, and forthwith came there out blood and water." The soldier did this to try if he were dead or not; and at all events he seemed resolved that he would give a finishing stroke to his life. The mixture of blood and water showed that the wound was of such a nature, that had he received it at any time, it was sufficient of itself to kill him. Now his death was of the utmost importance to us. If Jesus had not died we must have perished. If he had not so died, we should, as just intimated, have had no such strong proof of his living again, which is equally important for our salvation; for now we who trust in him may rest on his word, "Because I live ye shall live also." And on these accounts the Evangelist John is very particular, not only in stating this fact, but in adding that he had it not from mere hearsay, but that he himself saw it, being near the cross at the time, "And he that saw it bare record, and





his record is true: and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye might believe."

You see, then, how much depends upon many of the little particulars which the Evangelists have mentioned; and how desirable it was that John should supply facts with which perhaps the others were not so well acquainted, and which they might not, like him, have heard or seen.

You remember that after the resurrection of Jesus, he appeared to two of the disciples, going to Emmaus, a village about seven miles from Jerusalem, and that he "sat at meat with them, and took bread, and blessed it, and brake, and gave to them," and then "vanished out of their sight," or suddenly left them, while they were overcome with surprise at the discovery they just then made that it was Jesus himself; for before "their eyes were holden that they should not know him." That they then immediately returned to Jerusalem, where they "found the eleven gathered together;" and while some present were saying, that Jesus had appeared to Simon, they also declared that they had seen him. (See the twenty-fourth chapter of St. Luke.) After this he suddenly appeared among all the other disciples, save Thomas; and they told him, in a transport of joy, "We have seen the Lord" with our own eyes, and consequently can have no further doubt of the truth of his resurrection.

Now the Evangelist John tells us of a very particular circumstance that happened at this time. Thomas would not believe what even all the rest told him; and he declared that nothing should satisfy him about the Saviour's resurrection, short of seeing and touching him himself: "Except," said he, "I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe." Eight days after this, Jesus appeared among the disciples, when Thomas was with them; and he said to Thomas, "Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand and thrust it into my side; and be not faithless but believing." Thomas was astonished, and instantly confessed that it was indeed his divine Master, who was alive again; and he said to him, full of love, and gratitude, and praise, "My Lord, and my God!"





This is another very important fact, not mentioned by the other Evangelists, but noticed by John, and it serves to show how satisfactorily all the disciples were informed of the truth of our Lord's resurrection.

John also relates another appearance which took place at the sea of Tiberias. There were then present six disciples. Peter went a fishing, and not having succeeded, he and his companions were desired by Jesus, who stood unknown on the shore, to cast their net on the right side of the ship, and then they caught so many that they were unable to draw them up. John, "the disciple whom Jesus loved" in a very particular manner, on seeing this miracle, said directly, "It is the Lord;" and Peter instantly, without waiting to get ashore in the ship, cast off his fisherman's coat, and swam ashore to meet Christ. It is said "he was naked," but this does not mean quite so, but only that he had thrown off his cumbrous upper garment; so we call a person stripped who has thrown off his coat, though he has many other garments remaining on him.

The other disciples soon after landed with the fish, and "they saw a fire of coals there, and fish laid thereon, and bread," which Jesus had also miraculously prepared.

Jesus then invited the disciples to dine. This was "the third time that Jesus showed himself to his disciples." He had been often seen by individuals or small groups, but this was the third time he had showed himself to them when many of them were together.

And now he asked Peter to say, if he still loved him. And he asked him three times, because he had denied him three times. He did this, perhaps, to humble Peter for his offence, and, at the same time, to show his disciples, that he was yet a true disciple, whom they should not reproach, since he had forgiven him; for after each answer he commanded him to feed his lambs and his sheep, meaning the young and the old of his sincere followers, who are called his flock.

I have now taken notice of all the leading facts, and of some of the most difficult passages mentioned in the four gospels. I am aware that you will yet find some things, which I have not tried





to explain, and which you may wish to understand ; but respectful questions, put to those who know better than yourselves, may now help you easily through all difficulties.

The Evangelist in conclusion tells us, that "there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which if they should be written every one," "even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written." No more is meant by this than children sometimes mean, when they say of a large quantity of things, "there are oceans." They do not mean that there are as many as would fill the beds of oceans, but quite an abundance. So the Evangelist John simply meant, that there were many more prayers, many more conversations, many more miracles, many more kind acts of Jesus, which would have filled an immense number of volumes, had they been recorded; but as we can remember a few better than all, enough only are related that we "might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing," we "might have life through his name."





THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES.

THE FIRST AND SECOND CHAPTERS OF THE ACTS.

History of what the Apostles of Christ said and did immediately after his Death, Resurrection, and Ascension—Peter's first Sermon.

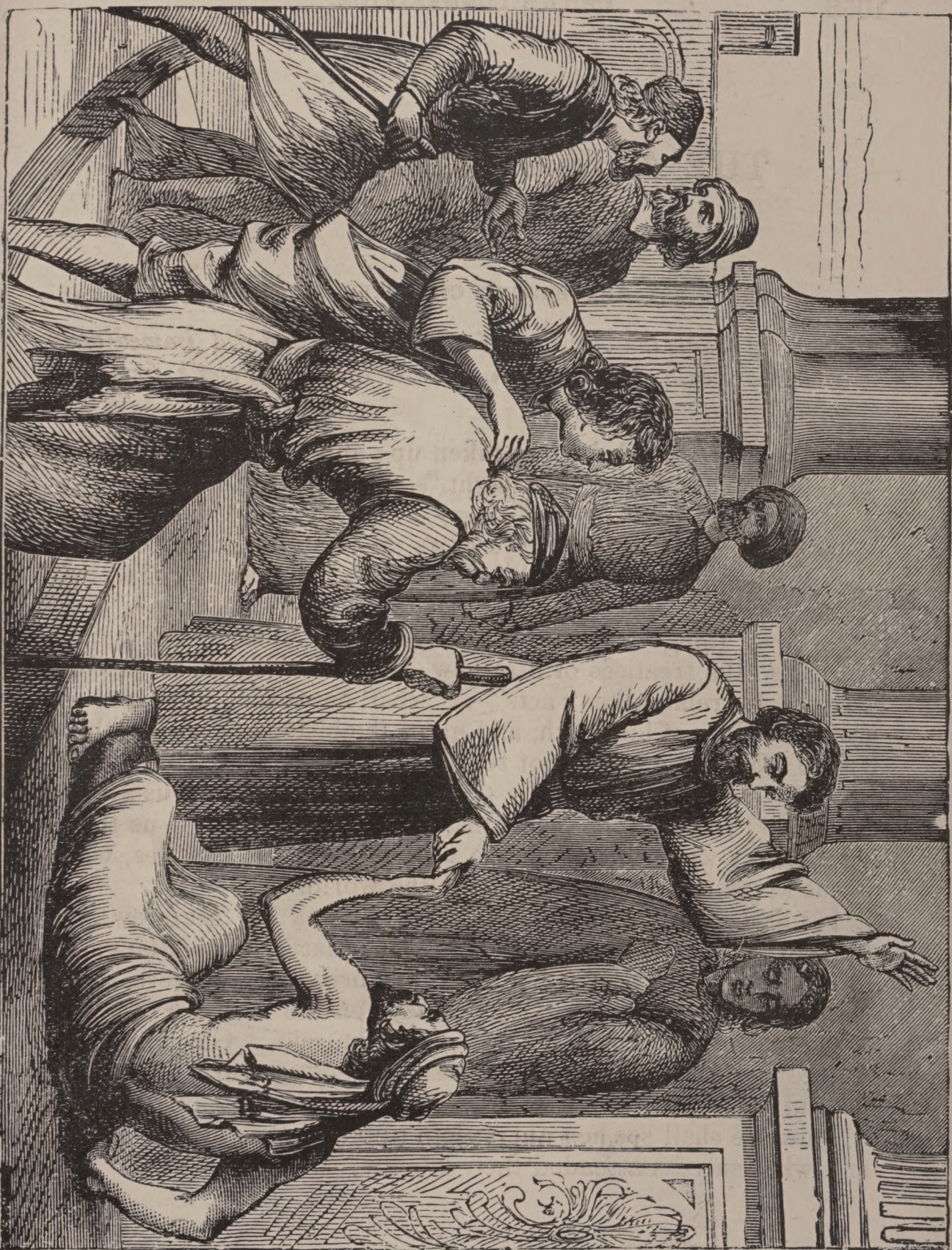
“While they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight.”—Chap. i. 9.

It is generally agreed by writers on Scripture, that this book was written by the Evangelist Luke. As “the former treatise,” or his Gospel, was written respecting “all”—meaning a great number of things—“that Jesus began both to do and teach,” as were also the treatises of Matthew, Mark, and John, so this was written to relate the “acts” or what his faithful servants *did* from the time of his death, and gives the history of about thirty years. This history does not tell us all things that the first ministers of Christ did, any more than the evangelists tell us all that Christ did; but it tells us all that is necessary to show us the divine power which attended the preaching of the apostles, whom Jesus appointed to spread it over the world.

I told you in my remarks on the tenth of Matthew, that “Apostles” means persons who are *sent*; that is, in other language, *messengers*. The first disciples were Christ’s messengers, as all good ministers must be, declaring to men the message of mercy, which he wished them to know, when he said, “Go ye out into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature;” tell every creature the *glad tidings—the good news*—which I have told you.

Now we shall see how the apostles obeyed their divine Master, and what success attended their labours.







PETER DELIVERED OUT OF PRISON.



In this chapter we learn that Jesus appeared to his disciples at different times, during forty days after his resurrection, and taught them many important "things pertaining to the kingdom of God;" or, as it means, the period of preaching the Gospel, commonly called "the Gospel Dispensation;"—that he told them to remain together at Jerusalem, and to "wait for the promise of the Father;" that they should have another comforter when he was gone—the HOLY SPIRIT—whose comforts they should feel in their hearts;—that he should give them such power, that nothing should hinder or discourage them in preaching the gospel in all parts of the world.

While Christ was giving these instructions, he finally left them, ascending up into heaven in a way like to that in which the prophet Elijah ascended, "and a cloud received him out of sight." Two angels then appeared, and as they gazed with wonder at the sky, they told them that in the same manner Jesus should again appear, meaning at the time when he shall come to judge the world. The account of his being "taken up," which is here given, is that which we commonly call *the ascension*, and the event happened on the mount of Olivet, a spot distant from Jerusalem "a Sabbath-day's journey," or the distance allowed for a Jew to walk on a Sabbath-day, which was a mile, or perhaps something less.

After Jesus had ascended to heaven, his disciples assembled together in "an upper room," which was a retired place, where they might pray, having those women who had so much loved the Saviour, joined with them.

Peter now observed to those that were met together, that one of the twelve disciples being deficient from the treachery of Judas, it was desirable to choose another, and they therefore cast lots to know whom they should choose: "and the lot fell upon Matthias."

In mentioning Judas, Peter says, that he purchased a field with the money which had been given him by the Chief Priests, "and falling headlong, he burst asunder in the midst, and all his bowels gushed out." Now we know that he returned the money to the Chief Priests, so that he could not have paid for the field; but as they afterwards purchased a field with the money, he probably bought and they paid for it; and it is also probable, that in





that very field he hung himself upon a high tree, from which he fell, and died in so dreadful a manner.

The day of Pentecost was the fiftieth and last day from the day on which the Jews offered the first fruits of their harvest, as a token of gratitude to God ; and that day of offering the fruits was the second day of the feast of the passover. On that day the disciples of Jesus were all met together "in one place;" and while they were so met, a singular sound filled the house, as though a wind were rushing through it, and flames, like fire, appeared on each of those assembled, having the shape of tongues, cloven, or divided. This was a miraculous token, that the "Holy Ghost," whose divine influences Jesus had promised, to comfort, strengthen, and instruct his disciples, had now come among them, in proof of which they "began to speak with other tongues" than their own.

Now, you must know, that it requires some time and labour, and diligence, to learn different languages, but these disciples knew a number of languages at once ; and the reason of this was, that they might directly tell people of different countries, who came to Jerusalem, about all the great things that Jesus had done, and what had happened to him, that sinners of mankind, in every country, might be saved.

At this time a great number of Jews, who inhabited various countries of the world, as they do now,—though the nation was not then entirely dispersed,—had visited Jerusalem, most likely to be present at the passover ; and hearing of the wonderful event which had taken place, they ran to the house where the disciples were, and there was universal astonishment when they found, that these disciples could speak the languages of all the countries whence they had come. Some of the people of Jerusalem, who hated Christ and his disciples, mocked, and said that they were drunk. They were more like drunken men themselves, who could suppose that men could speak other languages than their own merely because they were tipsy ; and if they had not been full of prejudice and hatred against Christ and his disciples, they would never have suggested so foolish a reason for their being all at once





so learned. However, the apostle Peter thought proper to answer them, and he preached a discourse on the occasion. He was always forward to speak, and he now spoke to some purpose.

He said, that what they heard was the extraordinary work of the Holy Spirit, as foretold by the prophets; that the troubled state of the world, and especially of the Jewish nation, which then existed, and was on an increase, was the sign by which they might understand the words of the prophet, for God had said by Joel, that he would pour out his Spirit, when there should be "blood, and fire, and vapour of smoke;" and when "the sun" should "be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood," language which I have before pointed out as figurative, or representing by the figure of awful appearances, and darkness in the heavens, the desolations which were, and were also coming on the earth, and especially on the Jewish nation. A few years only after this, the whole of this prophecy was completed, for the temple, city, and nation of the Jews, were all made desolate. Peter then added, that Jesus had appeared among the people—"a man approved of God"—that is, "declared by him to be the true Messiah and Saviour of the world," "by miracles, and wonders, and signs, which God did by him;" that they knew that all this was true; and yet they had, "by wicked hands," crucified this Saviour. But he had broken the bands of death, and was risen, a fact foretold of the Messiah by David, and therefore Jesus was the Messiah. That "that same Jesus, whom they had crucified," was "both Lord and Christ;" "Lord of all," and the true MESSIAH, which is the same as CHRIST.

"Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart;" that is, "the word of God entered into them, which cut and laid open their hearts, and the sin and wickedness of them;" and they felt as you have perhaps felt, when you have been detected in doing something you ought not to have done, and perhaps something very bad indeed; for shame and guilt pierce and wound the soul, as a sword cuts and pains the body. And they "said unto Peter, and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?" Peter told them they must "repent;" that is, their minds must be turned and altered, and they must be ex-





ceedingly sorry for the wickedness they had done, and they must be "baptized," as a proof that they had embraced the religion of Jesus, and then the Holy Ghost would work in their hearts, and make them both holy and happy.

In the course of the day, no less than "three thousand souls" repented and believed the Gospel, from the preaching of Peter, and were baptized, as a sign that they were added to the number of Christ's disciples.

THE THIRD AND FOURTH CHAPTERS OF THE ACTS.

The lame Man restored at the Gate of the Temple—Peter's second Sermon—The Apostles Peter and John taken before the Jewish Sanhedrim, and prohibited from preaching Christ.

"And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all."—Chap. iv. 33.

We have here the account of the apostles Peter and John working a miracle. We are told that they went up to the temple at the hour of prayer, and there they saw a poor man, who was born lame, and who was daily carried to the gate of the temple, which was "called Beautiful," on account of its being more handsome than the other gates. As he was unable to work, here he was to be seen begging alms of the charitable. As the two apostles entered, he asked them also to give him something. Little did he expect what he should get by that supplication. "Peter said, Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk. And he took him by the right hand, and lifted him up: and immediately his feet and ankle-bones received strength. And he, leaping up, stood and walked, and entered with them into the temple, walking and leaping, and praising God."

The cure of the man drew together a great number of people,





all wondering at what they saw; and Peter again embraced the opportunity of preaching a sermon to them, in which he told them the same truths as before, and urged them to repent of their sins, and to submit to Jesus as the Saviour of sinners, that Almighty Saviour, by whose power he had performed this cure.

Ministers cannot work such miracles now. It is not necessary that they should: for since the first preachers of the gospel proved by these, that the message they had to deliver was the message of God, the message was sufficiently proved by them to be true, and the miracles by which it was so proved, had no need to be repeated. Yet, God still shows, in other ways, when ministers preach his word, by often converting sinners, that is, turning them from their evil practices through their preaching. And when the word of God converts a sinner, it is clear that something works on his heart which is above the power of man, for we can never turn a sinner from his evil ways, but God's power can. This is then a miracle, which often attends the preaching of the ministers of Christ, and the gospel which they preach is—"the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth." This miracle is often so great, that those who know how wicked and hardened, or careless a sinner has been, and see the change which the gospel has made upon him, are struck with as much admiration, as those who saw the cure of the lame man at the gate Beautiful.

The Jewish priests who had opposed Christ, now tried to stop the mouths of his apostles, so they laid hold of them to prevent them from preaching again; and well might they fear the success of the apostles, for, under this sermon, no less than five thousand souls were converted!

The next day, the apostles, with the man that was cured, were taken before the Jewish Sanhedrim at Jerusalem, where were assembled together their rulers, elders, scribes, and priests; and the apostles were asked by what power they had cured the man, whether by the help of the devil, as they thought, or by the help of God. At this moment the Holy Ghost filled Peter's heart with the greatest courage, and he again preached, having the rulers and priests to hear him. These were not converted. but never-





theless they were struck with wonder at "the boldness of Peter and of John," for they recollected them as having been among the timid disciples of Jesus, who once all forsook him and fled. They could not also contradict a fact so clearly proved, that the lame man was cured; but lest the news of the resurrection should be spread, and the name of Jesus be increasingly honoured, they commanded the apostles in future, to refrain from saying anything about the blessed Saviour. But they said, "We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard;" and the rulers and priests were obliged to let them go, for they had no charge to bring against them; they had done a kind act, they had told no lie, and if they had punished them, which they would have done but "because of the people," every body would now have resisted their authority as cruel and unjust.

The apostles being set free, again joined their brethren, and told them of their treatment and escape. Then they all united together in prayer to God, to give them courage still to speak his word, and to enable them to show it was his word, by performing more miracles. And God gave them another sign as on the day of Pentecost,—a mighty shaking of the place where they were assembled, such as when a house is shaken with the wind, and by this sign they knew that the Holy Ghost would give them new power and energy, which immediately was the case, "and they spake the word of God with boldness."

THE FIFTH CHAPTER OF THE ACTS.

Ananias and Sapphira struck dead for lying—The Apostles Peter and John thrown into Prison—Released by an Angel—Taken again before the Sanhedrim, scourged, and set at liberty.

"And great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things."—Ver. 11.

There were now above eight thousand Christians; and as they were liable to great afflictions and persecutions in embracing the faith of Christ, they all readily agreed to sell their possessions,





and to put all their money into one common stock, and so help each other, just as they might stand in need.

But a man named Ananias, and Sapphira his wife, while professing to do as the rest did, gave only a part of their property, and silyly kept back the rest. This was very wicked, because, in so doing they told a lie; they as much as said, when they laid the money "at the apostles' feet," here is all we have got, when they had ever so much more.

Liars think they cannot be found out; but God can always find them out. And so he did here. His Holy Spirit told Peter's mind that Ananias had kept back part of his money; and he told Ananias that Satan had got possession of his heart to do so wicked a thing; that no one wanted to take his money from him if he had chosen to keep it, but he should not have pretended to give it all, and then keep back part; and, that having done so, he lied "unto God," and committed a grievous sin against him.

Ananias was terrified at this discovery; he was convicted of his sin, and instantly fell down dead.





In about three hours after this, Sapphira made her appearance, and not having heard of the death of her husband, she expected to see him among the disciples of Christ, received as one of his sincere and liberal followers. Peter then asked her, for how much the land was sold, for which Ananias had given the money. And she told him the same lie as Ananias, having agreed with him to deceive the apostles. Peter then rebuked her for daring to tempt or try the Spirit of the Lord, by seeing if it were not possible to conceal from his inspired apostles so base an action; and he said, "Behold, the feet of them which have buried thy husband are at the door, and shall carry thee out. Then fell she down straightway at his feet, and yielded up the ghost; and the young men came in and found her dead; and carrying her forth, buried her by her husband. And great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things." And well might they fear. These were awful examples of the hatred which God has to lying; for Peter could not have killed Ananias and Sapphira merely by what he said: it was God's hand that killed them. Oh! my dear young reader, if you have ever told a lie, praise God that he never struck you dead for it, as he did Ananias and Sapphira, and as he sometimes has others of whom I have heard.*

Sorrow sincerely that you ever committed so horrible a crime. Pray earnestly that God would pardon you for Christ's sake; and implore grace from his Holy Spirit that you may be preserved from doing such wickedness any more.

The apostles continued working miracles and preaching, "and believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women." The people also, learning what cures the apostles performed in the name of Jesus, thronged to them with their sick, and were happy if they could get within reach of the shadow

* I remember, that some years ago, a pious female friend of mine was passing through Covent Garden Market, where she saw a crowd of people gathered round a market woman who had fallen down dead. She inquired what was the matter with her, and was told that she had endeavoured to cheat a customer out of sixpence in change; and, on being charged with keeping it back, she said she wished God might strike her dead if she had kept back the money. God did strike her dead, and the money was found grasped in her hand!





only of Peter's body, supposing that there must be some virtue in it, not understanding how he cured only by the power of the blessed Jesus.

The Jewish rulers were now greatly enraged, that after they had so strongly commanded the apostles to be quiet, they still continued preaching about Christ, and working miracles in his name; and they "laid their hands on the apostles, and put them in the common prison," where they put their malefactors, as if they had done the very worst deeds, instead of kindly curing the sick and the lame.

But God sent an angel, who opened the prison door, at night, and set the apostles free, desiring them to go to the temple, and preach again to the people. And when in the morning the Sanhedrim assembled to bring the prisoners to trial for disobeying their orders, and sent for them from the prison, their officers were astonished to find that they had escaped. But while they were puzzling to know how this could happen, and what they should do, they were told that the apostles were again preaching in the temple. So the captain of the temple and his officers went and fetched them. On their being placed before the assembly, the High Priest charged them with disobeying their commands, when they had been told that they must say nothing more about Jesus. But Peter instantly replied, by preaching another bold sermon, charging them with being concerned in killing Jesus, and yet declaring that he was exalted to be a Prince and a Saviour, even "to give repentance to guilty Israel, and forgiveness of sins."

Their hearts were, however, so hard, that instead of being converted, they were only the more enraged, and put their heads together, to form a plan for secretly killing the apostles. But Gamaliel, a learned doctor of their number, having a better temper and more wisdom than the rest, told them to let things take their course; for one Theudas had raised a rebellion and perished in it, with four hundred of his followers; and so had one Judas of Galilee: and this would soon be the fate of these men, if they were impostors; but if they really were the messengers of God, and did their miracles by his power, nothing they could do could possibly hinder their progress.





This wise counsel had its effect, and so the Sanhedrim let the apostles go; but not till they had given them a scourging, or flogged them on their naked backs, with thirty-nine strokes of a whip, as the Jews were accustomed to punish offenders. All that now happened to the apostles, our Lord had foretold, as Matthew informs us in the tenth chapter of his gospel: "But beware of men: for they will deliver you up to the councils, and they will scourge you in their synagogues. And ye shall be brought before governors and kings for my sake." The apostles, therefore, rejoiced "that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name. And daily in the temple and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ."

THE SIXTH, SEVENTH, AND EIGHTH, CHAPTERS OF THE ACTS.

The Death of Stephen—Saul of Tarsus—Persecution of the Christians—Simon Magus—Philip and the Eunuch.

"And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly: and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith."—Chap. vi. 7.

In the sixth chapter we are told, that the disciples chose seven men out of their number to take care of the poor among them, that they should not be overlooked; Stephen, who was afterwards martyred, was among those now chosen. It is one beautiful feature of Christianity, that it never overlooks the poor. Be kind to the poor, and especially the pious poor, for Christ was kind to them.

The disciples of Jesus still continued to increase in numbers, and even many of the priests were at last converted. When we think how obstinate these had been, and what bitter enemies to Christ, we cannot but observe, how great was his grace in saving them, and how powerful too in overcoming their prejudices. This should make us hope and pray for the most wicked and hardened; for who knows but that they may be changed?





Stephen was a man very "full of faith," and he "did great wonders and miracles among the people." Like Peter and John, therefore, he was dragged before the council; and as there was no crime committed by him to condemn him, false witnesses were procured; and wicked men, for the sake of a reward, made up a story against him that he had spoken blasphemous words against the temple and the law. Stephen was quite calm and happy; "and all that sat in the council, looking stedfastly on him, saw his face, as it had been the face of an angel." The good man made a noble reply, and boldly told them of their wickedness, and of that of their fathers before them. He charged them with being "the betrayers and murderers" of Christ, and cut them so to the heart with what he said, that in their rage, they like a pack of dogs "gnashed on him with their teeth." Then thrusting him out of the city, they stoned him, while he called upon God, and said, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." And while they yet stoned him, he kneeled and prayed for his persecutors, and then "fell asleep." "Fell asleep!" Stephen was amidst a shower of stones, and he fell asleep! Saints when they die fall asleep. When we sleep, we rest; and death to them is no punishment, but only a rest.

"They die in Jesus and are bless'd,
How kind their slumbers are!
From sufferings and from sins releas'd;
And freed from every snare."

Stephen was the first Christian martyr.

And here begins the history of the most extraordinary man among all the apostles. At this time he was "a young man, whose name was Saul," and who was an enemy to Jesus, and took care of the clothes of the false witnesses that had pulled them off, that they might the better stone the pious Stephen. Indeed he "was consenting to his death," which means here, that he even "took pleasure" in it. "And at that time there was a great persecution against the Church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria," fleeing wherever they could to escape the fury of their enemies: the apostles only remained at Jerusalem, still to bear witness in behalf of Jesus. Among the persecutors none were





more active than this Saul; for "he made havoc of the church," falling on them like a wild beast on his prey, "entering into every house, and haling men and women," that is, dragging them by force, "committing them to prison." He most likely did not care for the cry of the child, "O spare my father!" nor for the screams of the infant clinging to the breast of its mother, nor for the sick or the aged who might plead their infirmities; his heart was steeled against all kindness, and inveterate against the Saviour, and those who loved him.

This persecution, however, turned out for good. Instead of checking the progress of the religion of Jesus, it only spread it abroad the more; for the disciples being driven from Jerusalem, "went everywhere preaching the word." Among those that preached with great success, was Philip. "Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them. And the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did." "And there was great joy in that city."

And there was a man at Samaria named Simon, whom we are accustomed to call *Simon Magus*, that is, Simon the magician or, conjurer; because he used cunning arts like the magicians of Egypt. This man "bewitched," or astonished, the people with his tricks, and they thought he was some most wonderful person. But when they heard the wonderful things about Jesus, which Philip had to tell, and saw how he cured the lame and the sick, and others, they would no longer believe in Simon Magus, but became disciples of Jesus; and Simon professed to be a disciple also.

The apostles at Jerusalem being informed of the great things doing at Samaria, sent Peter and John to assist Philip in his work. And they laid their hands on some of the disciples, as a sign of imploring the Holy Spirit to give them peculiar courage and abilities, that they might become fellow labourers in their great work; and the Holy Ghost gave them extraordinary abilities, as had been done to the disciples assembled on the day of Pentecost. Simon seeing this, and having been left out of the number, offered Peter money, if he would enable him to do the wonderful things which he saw





the others could do, that is, speak in different tongues, and heal diseases, and the like. Here he showed that his heart was awfully darkened, or he must have seen that no money could purchase such power, and that it could only have been given from above. This Peter told him, and exhorted him to repent, and pray God to forgive him for such wicked thoughts. It is most likely that Simon Magus, seeing he had lost his chance of being popular, and of making money, by his old tricks, wished now to attain the same ends, by means of the gifts of speaking and healing, having no design to glorify Jesus by what he might say and do; and it is generally believed that he died a bad man, for we never read of his heart having been changed.

But we have directly after a more pleasing account in the narrative of the Ethiopian eunuch.

Philip having been ordered by an angel to take a journey on the road from Jerusalem to Gaza, was travelling in obedience to the divine command, when he met with a black Ethiopian eunuch, an officer "of great authority under Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who had the charge of all her treasure, and had come to Jerusalem for to worship." He was now returning, and was sitting reading in his chariot. Philip was inclined, by a peculiar impression made upon his mind by the Spirit of God, to hold conversation with this eunuch; and, approaching his chariot, he found that he was reading aloud from the prophet Esaias, that is, Isaiah—the former being the Greek, and the latter the Hebrew name for the prophet. And Philip said, "Understandest thou what thou readest?" Now the eunuch, though riding in a chariot, was a very humble man; and sensible that he needed to learn all that he could, especially about the Saviour, he replied, "How can I, except some man should guide me? And he desired Philip that he would come up and sit with him." And he was reading the prophecy about the blessed Jesus being led as a sheep to the slaughter, and, like a lamb dumb before his shearer—but he was at a loss to know whether it spoke about the prophet, or about some other person. Philip then explained it to him, and preached about Jesus. No doubt he told him, that the prophet was setting forth the purity, innocency, meekness, and patience of the suffering





Jesus—"the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world;"—and showed him how he was led to be crucified, and so shed his precious blood for us, as the lamb's blood was shed upon the Jewish altars. No doubt he also told him of the command given to the disciples, to go and teach all nations, and to baptize them in the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. For, on arriving where there was some water, he desired to be baptized, and declared his firm belief that Jesus was the Son of God, and, therefore, he was willing to become one of his disciples; so Philip baptized him. Philip was now miraculously removed from his presence all on a sudden, a circumstance which must have satisfied the eunuch's mind that he was no inferior person, but a messenger sent from God, to teach him the way of salvation. So the eunuch went on homewards, rejoicing that he had been favoured with such news of salvation, and had found the knowledge of Christ crucified. The Scripture does not tell us, but some respectable ancient writers do, that this eunuch founded a flourishing church in his own country. Those who know Christ, will try to make others know him also.

THE NINTH CHAPTER OF THE ACTS.

Remarkable Conversion of Saul of Tarsus—Peter cures Eneas of Palsy—Raises Dorcas to Life.

"Then had the churches rest throughout all Judea, and Galilee, and Samaria, and were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied."—Ver. 42.

We shall now hear more about Saul of Tarsus, whose history has been interrupted by noticing the persecutions of the Christians, and the labours of Philip.

"Not satisfied with the murder of Stephen, and with the havoc he made at Jerusalem," we learn here, that Saul was "yet breathing



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THE DEATH OF STEPHEN.

CONVERSION OF SAUL.



out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, and he therefore went to the High Priest, and begged him to give him authority to go to Damascus, the capital city of Syria, that he might there search out for the Christians, and take all that he could find bound to Jerusalem.

But the grace of God stopped him, as it has many a wicked person, in his career. God might have struck him dead for persecuting his people, as he did Ananias and Sapphira for lying; but he chose to show what his Almighty grace could do in Saul of Tarsus, and though he struck him down, it was not to destroy, but only to subdue him. "As he journeyed, he came near to Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven: and he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" Now you must observe that Saul did not know Jesus; that Jesus was in heaven, and therefore he could not persecute him in person; but Jesus so loves those who love him, that in persecuting his sincere followers, he felt the cruelty of Saul as if it had been inflicted upon himself. And Saul said, "Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus, whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks," or goads, as a restless bullock would against the spiked stick with which his driver would urge him on with his work in the plough. Saul's spirit was immediately subdued; and he who had made others tremble, now trembled himself, and said, like a submissive servant, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" The great light which had flashed upon him from heaven, had blinded his eyes, and he was obliged to be led into Damascus as a blind person; and there, during three days, he could neither see, nor eat, nor drink. The Lord, now seeing Saul humbled and praying for mercy, commanded a disciple of the name of Ananias to search him out, and to speak comfortable things to him. Ananias knew what a bitter persecutor Saul was, and was afraid to go near him, but the Lord told him that he was one of his chosen vessels; and as men put treasure into urns, and such things, so he would put the treasures of his grace into the heart of Saul, and make him one of his most eminent ministers. So Ananias went to the house where Saul was, and restored him to sight as





he was commanded to do, and the Holy Ghost gave sight at the same time to his before darkened mind, and taught him every thing that could qualify him to preach Christ to sinners, and show them how he was a Saviour. And Saul was at the same time baptized as another disciple of Christ. Instead of persecuting the disciples, Saul now joined himself to them, and remained awhile with them at Damascus. And now "he preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God." People were every where surprised to see this bitter persecutor turned Christian preacher; and no doubt the Jews charged him with violating his engagement to persecute the Christians; but he faithfully told his story, and being aided in a wonderful way by the Spirit of God, he spoke with such wisdom and power that none could withstand his arguments, so that he "confounded the Jews which dwelt at Damascus, proving that this is the very Christ," the true Messiah.

The Jews now tried to kill him, as he had tried to kill others, and they hid themselves in certain places, to put him to death by suddenly falling upon him; and they watched the gates of Damascus night and day, that he might not escape. However, the disciples, notwithstanding their vigilance, managed to get him out of the city; for the house of one being built on the city wall, he was let down by a basket from a back window, and so got away from the city without passing through either of the gates.

Saul then went to Jerusalem; but his name was so terrifying there as a persecutor, that when he offered to unite with the disciples, they were all afraid of him. They most likely supposed, that he only professed to be a Christian that he might the better come at their secrets, and so play the part of a spy, and inform against them, and get them to be imprisoned and put to death. At length Barnabas told the disciples not to fear, and what wonderful things had happened to Saul, "and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus."

At Jerusalem also, the new apostle met with the most violent enemies, who seemed the more enraged against him, because he was a deserter from their ranks. Here the Grecians, as they are called, or Jews, that used the Greek language, and not Greeks, who were heathen, "went about to slay him," and he found no





rest till he went to his own city of Tarsus. After this the churches were allowed, for some time, to enjoy a little rest.

We now, for a short time, leave Saul at Tarsus, and return to notice what Peter was doing. We are told that he paid a visit "to the saints which dwelt at Lydda." Saints mean holy persons, and on that account the name is very descriptive of what a Christian ought to be. You will often find Christians mentioned in the epistles under this title. I need then scarcely observe, that those persons whom you may sometimes hear using this as a nickname for those who are very zealous in the service of God, and very strict in practising the duties of religion, are mocking the Scriptures while they mock the followers of Christ. And I must tell you, that you ought never to be ashamed, if your love to religion makes persons of no religion to laugh at you, and call you by the name of Saint. It is a title of great honour which they give to the sincere Christian, though they do not mean it.

Lydda; where Peter went, was a city about thirty miles from Jerusalem. Here Peter worked another miracle in the name of Jesus, and cured a certain man named Eneas, which had kept his bed eight years, and was sick of the palsy. I wish you to observe one thing here, which is worthy of notice, and that is, that when Jesus Christ performed any miracle, he always spake as God, commanding evils and diseases to go away, without using the name of any other person; but when Peter performed a miracle, he was careful to give the honour of it to the Saviour. "Peter saith unto him, Eneas, Jesus Christ maketh thee whole; arise, and make thy bed. And he arose immediately."

We are next informed about a good woman, whose name you may often have heard mentioned, because her memory is held in great repute on account of her being very charitable. Her name was Tabitha, in the Syriac language, and means *a roe*; and because a roe in the Greek is called Dorcas, that was the name which she bore among the Jews that spoke Greek. She lived at Joppa, a town now called Jaffa. This excellent woman died, and was laid out. Peter being then at Lydda, which was near Joppa, the disciples sent to him to tell him of their grief, and no doubt with a view to his restoring her to life. Peter hastened to Joppa,





and there he found the dead body in an upper chamber, "and all the widows" to whom Dorcas had been very kind and charitable, "stood by him weeping, and showing the coats and garments which Dorcas made while she was with them." It is from this circumstance that we call some of our societies for giving clothes to the poor—Dorcas societies.

Peter ordered every one of the widows to leave the room, that he might, in a more undisturbed way, kneel down and pray to God; and having done so, he said to the dead body, "Tabitha, arise. And she opened her eyes: and when she saw Peter, she sat up. And he gave her his hand, and lifted her up; and when he had called the saints and widows, he presented her alive."

These miracles caused many more to believe in Jesus; and Peter continued for some time at Joppa, with one Simon a tanner, no doubt busily engaged in following up these miracles, and conversions, by exhorting the disciples to continue firm in their attachment to Jesus, from which they would be liable to be shaken by future persecutions, which were to be expected from the envious Jews.

THE TENTH AND ELEVENTH CHAPTERS OF THE ACTS.

Cornelius's Dream—Peter's Vision.

"Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons."—
Chap. x. 34.

There was a man living at Cesarea, which was the Roman capital of the Jewish provinces, whose name was Cornelius, and he was a centurion, that is, an officer commanding a hundred men, who were Italians, subject to the Roman Government. This man was very pious and charitable, and particularly fond of praying to God. Now while he was devoutly engaged in one of the hours of prayer, an angel of God spoke to him in a vision; that is, he saw the angel, not in a dream by night, but in broad day; and the angel said to him, "Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a





memorial before God ;” meaning, “ that the prayers which he had put up in faith, for himself and family, and the charitable actions he had performed from a principle of love, were like sacrifices upon the altar, which ascended to God with acceptance.” And he desired Cornelius to send men to Simon the tanner’s house at Joppa, where Peter resided, and Peter would teach him about those great things which he was desirous of learning. So he sent two of his servants, and a pious soldier, to make inquiries for him at Joppa ; these were, no doubt, all concerned faithfully to do the business about which Cornelius had informed them.

These messengers went to Joppa on the next day after the vision of Cornelius, and reached it at another hour of prayer used among the Jews, and Peter at that moment was praying, and fell into a trance ; that is, he lost all sense of what was doing here, and felt as if he were a happy spirit, departed from the body ; and he saw heaven opened, and a large sheet let down to earth, and spread out before him as a table-cloth, in which were wild beasts and creeping things, as well as tame beasts and fowls ; and a voice desired him to kill and eat. Peter, who had strictly observed the Jewish law, had never eaten any thing which it forbade and called unclean, and he hesitated to touch the offered food. The voice then said, “ What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common.” This vision seems to have been repeated three times, to impress his mind the more strongly. Peter, on coming to himself, could not think what all this could mean ; but while he was thinking upon it, the messengers from Cornelius arrived at his door, and he was urged, by a secret impression of God’s Spirit, to meet them, and go with them.

When Peter arrived at the house of Cornelius, the good man had assembled his relatives and friends, supposing that some blessing from God would attend this extraordinary meeting, and he wished them to enjoy it as well as himself.

On seeing Peter, Cornelius fell at his feet “ and worshipped him,” or paid him reverence. He was not a foolish heathen, who paid him worship as if he had been a God, but he paid him very high respect as a servant of God, sent to instruct him. Peter, however, thought that he paid him more reverence than he ought.





and fearing he might rob Christ of the honour which was alone due to him, he "took him up, saying, Stand up, I myself also am a man."

And now Peter saw the plain meaning of the sheet, with the unclean creatures, of which he was to eat. This was a sign to teach him, that though he was a Jew, yet he was now to unite with those who would believe in Christ, of all nations; and he said to the company, "Ye know how that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew, to keep company, or come unto one of another nation; but God hath showed me that I should not call any man common or unclean."

Cornelius now told Peter for what reason he had sent for him, and that his little company were assembled to hear from him any words which God might speak through his lips.

Peter then preached to this Gentile company the same truths which he had preached to the Jews, and encouraged them to believe in Jesus as a Saviour, assuring them, that "in every nation he that feareth" God, "and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him;" and that whosoever believed in Jesus should receive remission, or enjoy the putting away of their sins, so that they should not be brought against them in the day of judgment.

While this honoured apostle was preaching, the Holy Ghost also came upon these Gentiles, as on the Jews assembled on the day of Pentecost. They also were now filled with zeal for the honour of Christ, and could speak in tongues they had never learned, so as to explain to all they might meet, of any country, the great things about their salvation. "They of the circumcision," that is, the Jews, who were present, were astonished; for they had no notion that the Gentiles would receive the Spirit, but thought that this blessing was to belong to the Jews only. These persons having received the Spirit were also baptized, to show that they were the disciples of Christ.

When Peter returned to Jerusalem, the pious Jews could not cast away their prejudices, but insisted upon it, that Peter had done wrong in eating with Gentiles; but when Peter had explained the vision, and what had happened at the house of Cornelius, "they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life."





The apostles who were scattered at the time of the persecution of Stephen, still continued "preaching the word;" but they confined their labours to the Jews only, and to the Grecians, or Jews which spake the Greek language, commonly called Hellenist Jews, which means Grecian Jews. These apostles preached at Phenice, Cyprus, Antioch, and elsewhere: "and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord." And Barnabas being sent from Jerusalem, paid a visit to the new disciples, at Antioch, where he was much delighted, for he "saw the grace of God," in its holy and happy effects, in the lives and dispositions of the people, and this made him "glad;" and while he preached, "much people" were also "added unto the Lord." Barnabas also got Saul of Tarsus to help him, and they laboured together for a whole year, "and taught much people."

It was at this time that "the disciples were called Christians first at Antioch." Some think that the name was given them as a mark of contempt; just as people who hate religion, sometimes call those who are religious by the name of Methodists; and so at last this name was used to distinguish all who professed to embrace the religion of Jesus. Many persons, now, however, bear the name of Christians, who know very little about Christianity, and are, indeed, a disgrace to it. To be really Christians, we must be sincerely the followers of the example of Christ.

The eleventh chapter closes by telling us about a kind act of the Christians at Antioch, in sending needed comforts to their brethren in Judea. At this time Agabus, who was endowed with the spirit of prophecy, foretold that a famine would shortly take place all over the world, "which came to pass in the days of Claudius Cæsar," a Roman emperor. The Christians at Antioch, which was a fine city in Syria, had some reason to believe that their brethren at Jerusalem would suffer much from this famine, and so they made no hesitation, but sent them what money they could spare to meet their wants, when the time of need should come. Christians should be kind-hearted to all, but especially to their fellow-Christians; if we love Christ, we must love those that are like him.





THE TWELFTH CHAPTER OF THE ACTS.

*The Apostle Peter's Imprisonment, and miraculous Escape—
Herod's miserable Death.*

"Peter therefore was kept in prison, but prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him."—Ver. 5.

The Herods were all bad men. Herod the Great slew the infants at Bethlehem, Herod Antipas beheaded John the Baptist, and Herod Agrippa "killed James, the brother of John, with the sword," which was one of the modes of putting to death among the Jews, that was considered very disgraceful, and was especially inflicted on those who deceived the people.

As he saw that the wicked Jews were pleased at this murder of one of our blessed Lord's apostles, he proceeded next to persecute Peter, and by his orders this faithful servant of Christ was thrown into prison, and carefully guarded by "four quaternions of soldiers," that is, sixteen—a quaternion consisting of four; and these quaternions relieved each other's guard, and so watched him by turns, night and day. It was impossible that he could escape but by some miracle, for his hands were chained, and when he slept at night, he had two soldiers lying by him, one on each side, and the chain on each hand was fastened to a hand of each soldier.

But nothing can withstand the power of God; and when the Christians met together to pray for Peter's deliverance, God heard their prayers, and sent his angel to set him free. The very night that this happened was to have been Peter's last night in prison; for, on the next morning, Herod intended to have exposed him to the people, and to have put him to death, as he did James. When the angel appeared surrounded with brightness, which illuminated the prison, he awoke Peter by touching his side, and raising him up, "his chains fell from off his hands;" and having put on his girdle and his sandals, he followed the angel out of the prison. All this was so sudden and surprising, that Peter scarcely





believed it was real, and thought he must be dreaming. When they had passed the first and second ward, or watch, they had to escape through the strongest gate of the prison, a gate made of iron, and through which they could enter directly into the city. This gate opened of its own accord, and so Peter escaped from the hands of his enemies. What was the state of the guards during this time is not said. Perhaps a deep sleep came over them, or their sight was darkened so much, as to be unable clearly to distinguish objects at the moment.

The angel having left Peter in the street, he began to recover from his astonishment, and comforted himself that God had really interposed to save him. Then, without loss of time, he hastened to his fellow-Christians, who were just then met together for prayer at the house of "Mary, the mother of John, whose surname was Mark." Having knocked for admission, a young woman, named Rhoda, or Rose—for that is the meaning of Rhoda—coming to the gate, asked from within who was there, and on hearing Peter's voice, was so overcome with joy, that she ran in and told the company instead of stopping to let him in. Though they were praying, and no doubt praying for his release, yet they could hardly believe that it had happened so soon, and they said to the young woman, "Thou art mad;" and when she assured them it was true that Peter was at the gate, they said, "It is his angel:" they thought it was some heavenly messenger that had assumed his form, to bring them some news about him.

As Peter continued knocking, they went and opened the door, and, to their astonishment, they saw Peter himself, and he then told them how he had escaped.

When day-light came, Peter being missed from the prison, the soldiers were all in alarm; and Herod, on being told what had happened, was so enraged, that he ordered the poor soldiers to be put to death, or executed, as we say, for their negligence.

Herod now left Jerusalem, and went on a journey to Cesarea, a city about seventy-five miles from it. Here he was visited by some persons of importance, who were sent from the people of Tyre and Sidon, to reconcile him after some offence which he had taken, and on account of which they feared he would make war against





them. This would have been ruin to them, for they lived by merchandize, which they could not then so extensively sell; and as they were not accustomed to the labours of the field, they were also "nourished by the king's country;" that is, received their food from it, especially their corn. Herod appointed a day to receive the supplicants, as he sat on his throne, and being very splendidly dressed with robes, which Josephus, the Jewish historian, says were richly worked with silver, that sparkled brilliantly in the sun, he delivered a speech to the ambassadors of Tyre and Sidon, in the presence of a great multitude of people. Perhaps, in his pride, he told them how kind and god-like he was to hear them, and that they should highly value his mercy, that he did not put them all to death for displeasing him, and destroy their flourishing cities. The foolish people, in order to compliment the king, cried out, "It is the voice of a god, and not of a man." The more foolish king was delighted with this praise, and instead of reproving them for their blasphemy, in so extolling a poor dying mortal like themselves, he silently heard and rejoiced in their flattery. But God can punish kings that offend him, as well as poor men; and while this impious king was setting himself up for a god, an angel secretly smote him, "because he gave not God the glory," in reproving the profane people, "and he was eaten of worms," and died. The Scripture writers give us no further particulars, but Josephus, the Jewish historian, tells us, that he had great pains in his bowels, and died in five days.

THE THIRTEENTH AND FOURTEENTH CHAPTERS OF THE ACTS.

The Travels, and Sufferings, and Success of Paul and Barnabas—Paul cures a Lame Man at Lystra—Paul and Barnabas mistaken by the Heathen for Gods—Paul nearly killed at Lystra by stoning.

"And there they preached the gospel."—Chap. xiv. 7.

In this chapter we find Barnabas and Saul travelling about together to preach the gospel. They went to Seleucia, a city of







ANANIAS STRUCK BLIND.

THE DEATH OF ANANIAS.



Syria, and thence "they sailed to Cyprus," an island in the Mediterranean Sea. There they visited Salamis, a chief city of Cyprus; and thence they proceeded to Paphos, on the same island. At Paphos there was a sorcerer, whose Jewish name was Bar-jesus, and who was also called Elymas. This man was in favour with Sergius Paulus, the deputy of the country, or governor of the island, and perhaps lived with him. When he found that Saul and his companion were preaching the gospel, he "withstood them, seeking to turn away the deputy from the faith," so that he might not believe the truth which Saul and Barnabas preached, for he knew it would ruin his art. Then Saul, being aided by a divine power, given him by the Holy Ghost, boldly declared that he was a wicked man, and a deceiver, and foretold that God Almighty would strike him blind for a season, as a punishment for his wickedness; and immediately he became blind. This proved that Saul was divinely inspired to teach what he said, and that Elymas was very wicked in opposing him; and Sergius Paulus was so convinced, that he became a real Christian.

We are here told, that Saul was also called Paul. It was common to have two names of these kinds; for Saul was the Hebrew name by which this apostle was known among the Jews, but Paul was his Roman name.

From Paphos they next "came to Perga, in Pamphylia," a country in Asia, of which Perga was the chief city; and from Perga "they came to Antioch in Pisidia," so called to distinguish it from Antioch in Syria. Here they went into the synagogue on the Sabbath-day, and were invited by the rulers to speak; and Paul preached a sermon to the people, the design of which was to show that Jesus was the Messiah, the anointed one of God, for whom the Jews had long looked; that he was of the seed of David, as foretold by the prophets; that though he had died, he had also risen again, and that now they were come to preach salvation in his name.

The people were so struck with this sermon, that they wanted to have another on the next Sabbath; but the rulers would not allow of it, for they were jealous, because the preacher had attracted so much attention. Then Paul and Barnabas told them





that since they had refused to hear any more about Christ, they should carry the glad tidings to the Gentiles, or heathen, which the heathen, at Antioch, were glad to learn ; and many of them heard the holy preachers and believed.

The Jews then raised a persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and got some women, who had gained fame as devout women, from their attention to the laws of their religion, and who were also of rich families, to help them in driving these servants of Christ out of the city. So they shook the dust off their feet as Christ had told them to do, if their message was not received in any place, as a sign of displeasure against it, and they "came unto Iconium," another place, on the borders of the country.

At Iconium they again went into the Jews' synagogue, and "a great multitude," both of the Jews and also of the Greeks, believed their divine message. Here, however, the unbelieving Jews stirred up much opposition against them, and prejudiced the minds of the Gentiles : nevertheless, they continued preaching for some time in spite of their enemies, and "the Lord gave testimony to," or witnessed, or declared what they said to be "the word of his grace, and granted signs and wonders to be done by their hands;" that is, they healed the sick, and cured the lame, and did other such works ; which showed that God was with them in their labours, for these were things which no other men could do, and which could only be done by his especially giving them power.

The Jews and Greeks were now greatly divided among themselves ; some of them believed, and some of them did not believe, notwithstanding all the divine proofs of the heavenly message ; and as parties rose very high, and it was determined by some that they would even stone Paul and Barnabas, they left the place, that they might carry the gospel elsewhere, where the hearts of many more would be ready to receive it.

They now "fled unto Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia," in Lesser Asia, "and there they preached the gospel."

Here a man, who was born a cripple, was sitting to hear a discourse, when the apostle Paul, perceiving that he had faith in the truth of his message, addressed him before all the people, and





“said, with a loud voice, Stand upright on thy feet; and he leaped and walked.”

The heathen people were so astonished and delighted, that they said, “The gods are come down to us in the likeness of men.” They thought there were many gods, and that these were two of them. They knew no better, not having the Scriptures; and they took Barnabas for Jupiter, one of their gods, and Paul for Mercury, another of them; and, according to their custom of worshipping and honouring their deities, the priest of Jupiter, which was before their city, brought oxen and garlands unto the gates, and would have done sacrifice with the people, that is, have sacrificed the oxen to Paul and Barnabas; but the apostles rent their clothes, as the Jews did when they heard blasphemy, and showed what horror they felt, that the people should make such a mistake. They then declared they were only men, and exhorted them to cast off their false gods, and believe in “the living God, which made heaven and earth, and the sea, and all things that are therein.” The people were, however, even then, with difficulty prevented from worshipping the apostles. Yet notwithstanding this servile adoration of them, when, soon after, some Jews arrived in the city from Antioch and Iconium, who told them how the apostles had been driven from those places, and spoke against them—these same people, who had seen the miracle performed on the lame man, and would then have adored the apostles, now were persuaded to stone Paul—so fickle were they; and they hurt him so much that he appeared to be dead, and his body was dragged by them out of the city. He must have been dreadfully injured by this treatment; but God left the people without-excuse for future punishment, in thus treating his servant, and tried the boldness of Paul in his cause; and when he was left for dead, he wonderfully restored him, so that he was immediately able to pursue his journey to another place; “and the next day he departed with Barnabas to Derbe,” a city of Lycaonia, as mentioned in the sixth verse, and there they made many disciples; and then they revisited Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, to instruct, comfort, and establish the minds of those that had believed, that they might not be frightened at their persecutions.





Here the Christians now formed themselves into churches, congregations of faithful men; and the apostles having taught them and prayed with them, set them in order, and appointed proper persons from among them to manage the worship of God, and for other Christian purposes.

Then they passed through Pisidia, the country where Antioch was, and came to Pamphylia, in Asia, and preached at Perga, in that country, and thence went into Attalia, a sea-coast town on the borders of the Mediterranean Sea. Then they took shipping and sailed to the other Antioch, which was in Syria, and delighted the Christians there, by telling them of their travels, and of the great success which, notwithstanding all opposition, had attended their preaching of the gospel of Christ—"And there they abode a long time with the disciples."

THE FIFTEENTH AND SIXTEENTH CHAPTERS OF THE ACTS.

Disputes among the Christians at Jerusalem, settled by the Apostles—Paul and Barnabas separated—Paul takes with him young Timothy from Lystra—Further Travels—Paul's Vision in the night, in consequence of which he goes into Macedonia—Conversion of Lydia—Paul cast out an evil Spirit from a Girl at Philippi—He and Silas are scourged and thrown into Prison—Earthquake, and Conversion of the Jailor and his Family—Paul and Silas set at liberty.

"And he went through Syria and Cilicia, confirming the churches."—Chap. xv. 41.

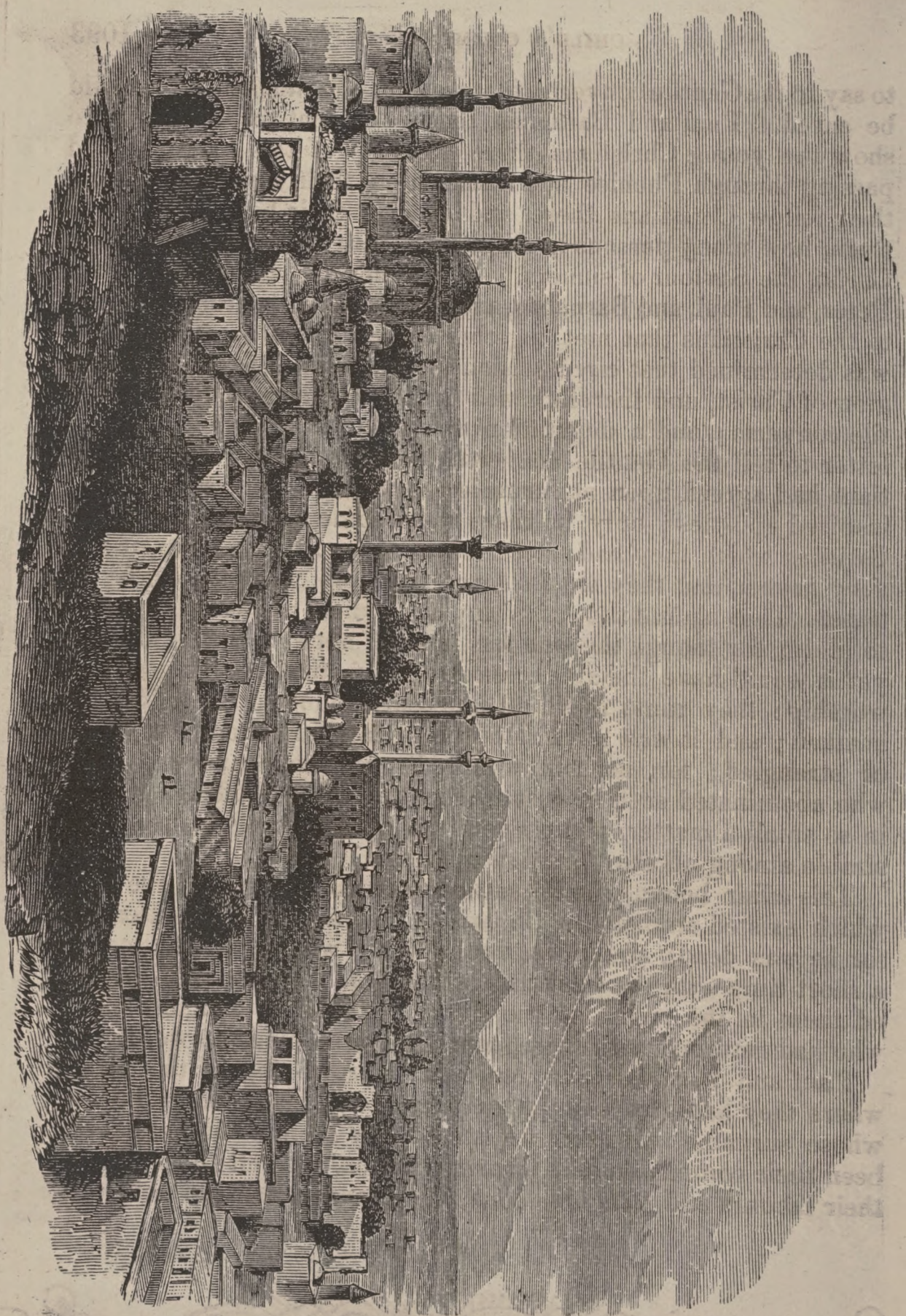
While Paul and Barnabas were at Antioch, in Syria, some persons from Jerusalem came to Antioch, and raised a dispute. These were Jews who had become Christians, but were still much attached to some of their old rites, or religious customs; and among the rest, they taught that it was necessary to be circumcised, or have a portion of flesh cut off, after the manner of the Jews, as a token that they put off the works of the flesh. They even went so far as





PAUL PARTING FROM THE DISCIPLES.

CITY OF ICONIUM.





to say to the Gentile converts, that without circumcision none could be saved. Paul and Barnabas, therefore, went to Jerusalem, to show the young Christians there the folly of this dispute; and passing through Phenice and Samaria on their way, they visited their fellow Christians there, and cheered their hearts by telling them, how many persons in all parts were truly believing in Jesus Christ, the Saviour of sinners. When they arrived at Jerusalem, Peter, and Paul, and Barnabas, and James, delivered their opinions to the Christians that met together to settle the question, and it was determined that circumcision did not form a part of the religion of Christ, and therefore was not to be practised by the Gentile converts; and a deputation was sent off to Antioch, with a letter to tell the Gentile converts there what their fellow-Christians had agreed upon at Jerusalem, after being addressed by the inspired apostles; only, as there were some customs among the Gentiles which they had practised in their heathen rites, it was very proper that they should leave these off, on becoming Christians. They should not eat of any food which had been sacrificed to idols; for though the food was in itself none the worse for that, yet it would have the appearance of their still approving of idol worship: they must avoid all indecent conduct practised by the heathen; and it was advisable not to eat things made of blood or strangled; for, as this would disgust the converted Jews, who abominated such food, it was as well to avoid offending them in so small a matter, and prevent that intercourse which was desirable among all the Christian converts.

This affair being quietly settled without disturbing the love which existed among the Christians, Judas (not Judas Iscariot, for he was dead), and Silas, two of those who were sent, stayed a short time with the Christian brethren at Antioch, and instructed them in the truths of the gospel; and Paul and Barnabas, who had returned with them, continued preaching the word.

Paul and Barnabas now resolved on revisiting all the places where they had preached the gospel; and Barnabas wished John, whose surname was Mark, to accompany them; but he, having been their companion on a former occasion, and left them to bear their labours and dangers alone, in a manner that did not quite





please Paul, who perhaps thought him timid, or not sufficiently zealous, Paul did not wish to have his help. This caused a misunderstanding between Paul and Barnabas, and so they parted company. Barnabas, taking Mark with him, sailed to Cyprus, an island in the Mediterranean Sea, and, as we learn in the latter part of the fourth chapter, the native place of Barnabas. Paul, accompanied by Silas, took another route, and went through Syria and Cilicia, which was his native country, and visited the churches or assemblies of Christians, whom he had before brought, through his preaching, to receive the religion of Christ.

Among the places visited again by the apostle Paul, were Derbe and Lystra. At the latter place he found a young disciple named Timotheus, or Timothy, the same to whom he afterwards wrote the Epistles. The mother of this young man was a Jewess, but his father was a Greek; and so it happened that he was not circumcised. Now, as Paul wished to have his aid as a fellow-labourer, seeing that he was a youth of fine talent and spirit, but as the Jews would not have allowed him to speak in the synagogues, unless he had been circumcised, Paul therefore "took and circumcised him, because of the Jews which were in those quarters;" who, knowing that his father was a Greek, and therefore had not had the rite performed upon him, would have raised objections to his preaching.

And now they travelled throughout Phrygia in Asia, and the region or country of Galatia, in that part called Asia Minor; then they came to Mysia, another country in Asia Minor, and "assayed," or attempted, to go into Bithynia, another country also in Asia Minor, but were prevented, by a particular impression made on their minds by the Spirit of God. Perhaps had they gone, their lives would have been taken, and these God designed to spare for future labours. He could, indeed, have protected them anywhere, but he chose rather that they should refrain from thrusting themselves, at this time, into such danger. Or, it might be that having particular work for them elsewhere, he prevented them from choosing a different road. So they did not stop at





Mysia ; but "came down to Troas," then a colony of the Romans, now called Alexandria.

Being prompted by the Spirit of God in a vision, or sort of trance, which happened in the night, and in which a man of Macedonia appeared before Paul, and said, "Come over unto Macedonia and help us," Paul proceeded to that place, which was a very large country in Europe. He loosed, or set sail, from Troas, and reached Samothracia, an island in the Archipelago, and the next day Neapolis, a sea-port, which was a part of Macedonia. From thence he went on to Philippi, the chief city of that part of Macedonia, and stopped there some days. Here, on the Sabbath day, they visited one of the spots where the Jews worshipped, and "spoke to the women which resorted thither."

Among these women was one named Lydia. She was a seller of purple—most likely of purple dye, which was a valuable article at that time—and she belonged to a place called Thyatira, which was a flourishing city of Asia Minor. She was a worshipper of the one true God; but knew nothing of Jesus Christ. But now she heard him preached, the Lord opened her heart, like a door, to let him into it by faith; and she received Jesus there, and embraced all the important truths spoken about him by Paul. And she was baptized, and received the sacred messengers into her house, while they remained in that neighbourhood.

The apostles regularly went to a place used for prayer; and a girl, who knew their custom, followed them, as they went every day, and cried after them, "These men are the servants of the Most High God, which show unto us the way of salvation." This girl was one of a certain class of people of those days, who pretended to be divinely inspired, and who might possibly have been permitted to perform some astonishing things, by the aid of the devil, who seems to have had full possession of her mind. By her works of magic she gained much money. It seems that she was not free, but belonged to masters who received what she gained. Paul, perceiving what kind of a person she was, was grieved at her condition, and, in the name of Jesus Christ, he commanded the evil spirit to come out of her. "And he came out the same hour."

It is wonderful that this girl should have cried out in such





terms of praise of the apostles ; but perhaps it was an instance, to show us, that the most wicked spirit may be overcome by the power of the Spirit of God ; and therefore she was obliged to speak in praise of the servants of God, whom she would perhaps otherwise have abused and ill-treated.

Her masters were greatly enraged that they had now lost their gains, for the girl could serve the devil no longer. They therefore seized Paul and Silas, and carried them before the magistrates, accusing them of teaching doctrines and customs contrary to the laws. Then the magistrates had them stripped, by tearing off their clothes ; and commanded them to be beaten with rods, after which they were cast into prison, and the jailor had orders to take the greatest care that they should not escape. So he thrust them "into the innermost prison"—one that, lying beyond others, and having more bolts and bars, was the more secure. And still to add to their security, he put their feet fast into heavy wood stocks, and thus they lay, as it is supposed, in the most painful position, with their sore and naked backs stretched upon the cold and dirty ground—the prisoners not sitting as in England, when the stocks are used.

In this situation, which would have made most men groan and weep, Paul and Silas, being comforted in their minds in an extraordinary way, sang praises to God in the middle of the night : it is thought that they sang one of David's Psalms, which is not unlikely. "And suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken : and immediately all the doors were opened, and every one's bands were loosed." The keeper awoke with the noise, and seeing the doors open, and the prisoners free, he drew his sword, and would have killed himself, fearing that he should be dreadfully punished for their escape. But Paul cried out to him, "Do thyself no harm ; for we are all here." Then he called for plenty of lights, and "came trembling," and, according to the Eastern custom of showing respect, fell down before Paul and Silas, and bringing them out of the inner prison, he began to talk to them directly about his poor soul, and asked, "What must I do to be saved ?" The apostles told him to "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ ;" and they also preached to his





whole family. Then the jailor washed their stripes, which had perhaps begun to fester, and showed them every kindness. They had done good to his soul, and to the souls of his family, as well as saved his body, when he was about to destroy himself; and the least he could do for them, was to show them kindness by comforting their bodies. The people's hearts were all ready to receive the gospel from their lips; and having renounced their idolatries, they declared their readiness to become Christians, and were all of them baptized. Then the jailor took his prisoners into his house, and set meat before them, to refresh their wearied bodies, and they all rejoiced together.

In the morning, the magistrates thought that Paul and Silas had had punishment enough, and so sent orders for them to be released. But Paul, being a Roman citizen, now maintained his privilege; teaching us, that Christianity is not at all opposed to our claiming and defending our civil rights; that is, those which belong to us as men and citizens. "They have beaten us openly uncondemned," said he, "being Romans, and have cast us into prison; and now do they thrust us out privily? Nay, verily; but let them come themselves and fetch us out." The magistrates had taken upon themselves to do what they were not authorized to do; for the magistrates were not to try prisoners, but only to see that the lawless were seized and secured, and that the law was properly put into execution when the prisoners were condemned. Paul, therefore, on account of others, as well as on his own account, would not sanction such shameful proceedings; he did not, however, demand revenge upon them, though he might have got them severely punished for what they had so unjustly done, but he required that they should acknowledge themselves wrong, and with all respect, make amends to them by fetching them out. So the magistrates, being now greatly frightened, went to the prison, and begged Paul and Silas to forgive them, and that they would leave the city as soon as possible, that nothing more might be said about the matter.

When they had quitted the prison, they paid another visit to their kind hostess, Lydia, and then pursued their journey.





THE SEVENTEENTH AND EIGHTEENTH CHAPTERS OF THE ACTS.

Paul preaches at Thessalonica, and is persecuted there—Goes to Berea, and is very successful—Visits Athens, and preaches at Mars' Hill—Visits Corinth, where he meets with Aquila and Priscilla—Resides there some time, where he is opposed by the Jews, but protected by Gallio, the chief Magistrate—Goes into Syria—Visits Ephesus—Lands at Cesarea, returns to Antioch, and travels through Galatia and Phrygia—Apollon preaches at Ephesus.

“And he [Paul] reasoned in the synagogues every Sabbath.”—
Chap. xviii. 4.

Paul and Silas, having passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, both considerable cities in Macedonia, “came to Thessalonica, a free city of the same country,” where the Roman governor resided. Here there “was a synagogue of the Jews,” and, during three successive Sabbaths, Paul went in and reasoned with them about what the Scriptures said of the Messiah, and proved that Jesus was he. His facts and arguments were so forcible, that, accompanied by the power of the Spirit of God, many Jews, and Gentiles who had become Jews, were converted.

This enraged the unbelieving part of the Jews; and so, supposing Paul to be at the house of Jason—one of their number who through Paul had believed on Christ—they violently beset his house, and dragged him out, with others, to the rulers of the city, and charged them with turning the world upside down, or throwing every place which they visited into confusion by their doctrines. The magistrates, however, acted on this occasion with great propriety, and as these Christians were accused of being troublers, they only required pledges of them that they would not in future disturb the peace of the city, but did not attempt to punish them, where they could not see they had committed any crime.





Paul and Silas having left the city quietly during the night, proceeded next to Berca, another city in Macedonia, and there also they "went into the synagogue of the Jews." Here the gospel was readily received by the people, who heard Paul and Silas with attention, and then examined the Scriptures for themselves, to see if what was said about the Messiah agreed with the character of Jesus Christ; and so, many of them became true Christians.

The Jews of Thessalonica, hearing of their success, followed them to that place, and stirred up the unthinking part of the people to disturb the apostles.

The apostle Paul was therefore sent out of the way, because against him the bitterest enmity prevailed; and Silas and Timothy remained behind, to explain things further to the young converts, who would have many questions to ask about what Jesus Christ taught and did.

Paul next went to Athens, a city in Greece, exceedingly famous for its knowledge and learning. When he arrived there his spirit was grieved and provoked, to see the stupidity of the people, notwithstanding all their knowledge, for the city was full of idols: it had more images called gods than all the rest of Greece, so that one humorously said of it, it was easier to find a god there than a man. Here Paul, according to his custom, disputed with the Jews in their synagogue, and with "the devout persons," or Jewish proselytes, who had left heathenism and embraced Judaism; and he also took every opportunity of conversing about Christ with the Athenians, whom he met in the great market-place.

In this city he was violently opposed by the heathen philosophers, called Epicureans and Stoics.

The Epicureans were so called from their first teacher, Epicurus. Though they believed there was a God, they were foolish enough to believe that the world was made by chance, and that no Providence ruled over it. See how ignorant the wisest of men were without the Scriptures. We should now hardly suppose that any one in his senses, on surveying the heavens and the earth, and the curious forms of all the creatures by which it is inhabited, could suppose that all these came by chance; or, when he thinks on the





preservation of order in the world, the bounding of the ocean, the succession of day and night, of spring and autumn, of summer and winter—of human life in myriads of beings, and of the world in general—we must pity his intellect, if he can deny the overruling Providence of God. Yet there are even now some persons who are accounted wise, and are so foolish; these are living proofs that what the Scriptures say of these men is true—"The world by wisdom knew not God." The Stoics received their name, not from their founder, whose name was Zeno, but from a Greek word, *Stoa*, which signifies a portico, or piazza, because it was customary for Zeno to walk under a portico, and teach his scholars. He was wiser than the Epicureans, since he believed that God did make the world; but he, like them, denied that he cared anything about it after it was made; and so, instead of being ruled by his Providence, it was left to Fate.

These were the men with whom Paul had here chiefly to contend. They were, however, disposed to hear him; for, though they despised him, and called him a babbler, yet, as he brought with him doctrines new to them—and they were fond of "some new thing"—they thought, at least, that they should be amused.

There was at Athens a noted edifice called the Areopagus, which means the Hill of Mars. This building was used as a court of law, and was adapted to accommodate a large concourse of people. Here it was determined that Paul should publish his opinions. It was a fine opportunity, and he embraced it.

He told them that he had observed that they were very superstitious, or given to the worship of many and false gods; and that in passing through their streets, he had even seen an inscription—"TO THE UNKNOWN GOD"—which perhaps meant the God of the Jews, of whom they had heard, but did not know. Now, he came to tell them who he was, and that instead of the world being made by chance, as some among them believed, He it was who made all things, and all men; and whose providence, so far from not noticing the world he made, even notices every individual, and fixes the boundaries of every man's life, and the very spot where he shall reside. And as we spring from God, our spirits being breathed into us by his Spirit, nothing could be more absurd





than to imagine, that stone, carved into different images, should represent God, many of them being even unworthy to represent men, whom God has made. For a long while God had borne with this idolatry, but now Paul declared he had sent his apostles to bear witness against it, and called upon men everywhere to repent, for he has determined to judge the world, and Christ will be the judge, who is now risen from the dead.

On mentioning the subject of the resurrection, the whole assembly seem to have been in a tumult. It was a doctrine either disbelieved, or rarely thought of by the Grecian philosophers. "Some mocked; and others said, We will hear thee again of this matter." So as they were not disposed to hear any more at that time, and received his message so unfavourably, Paul left them. Yet his address was not altogether useless: "Howbeit, certain men clave unto him, and believed; among the which was Dionysius, the Areopagite," or a judge in the court of Areopagus: "and a woman named Damaris, and others with them."

Paul next proceeded to Corinth, another Grecian city, of considerable importance. Here he took up his abode with a Jew named Aquila, and his wife Priscilla, who had lately left Rome in consequence of a decree of the Emperor, that no Jews should remain there any longer. From what is reported by historians, it is supposed that this decree was made because the Jews were so violent in opposing the Christians, that they caused continual disturbances. It appears that Paul and Aquila were of the same craft or trade, tent-makers, and this was one reason which brought them together. It was no disgrace among the Jews to be of a trade, but rather a disgrace to be without, and therefore every one was brought up to a trade, that he might never want the means of procuring his livelihood; and so the apostle Paul, though a learned man, and brought up at the feet of the learned Gamaliel, that is, as his pupil, was nevertheless taught the craft of tent-making. Tents, in hot countries, are very common and useful, and it was by this trade that the apostle supported himself while preaching the gospel.

While at Corinth, Paul, as usual, visited and "reasoned in the





synagogue every Sabbath ;" and here he was joined by Silas and Timotheus.

The Jews having refused to hear what he had to say about Christ, Paul "shook his raiment," it being loose about him, as a sign that he would shake them off, and have no more to do with them, and went to the Gentiles, who were in the city. For this purpose he took up his abode at the house of a man named Justus, who, though not a Jew, was a sincere man, and worshipped the true God, having learned about him from the Jews, his house being near the synagogue. His labours were, however, not altogether useless among the Jews, for "Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord, with all his house : " many Corinthians also believed.

Paul was, indeed, particularly encouraged in his labours at Corinth, for God told him, in a vision, "I have much people in this city." "And he continued there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them."

The success of Paul excited the enmity of the Jews, whose rage against Christ was as bitter as it still is. They therefore rose up against Paul, and accused him before Gallio, the Roman officer, who at that time presided over Achaia, in which the conquered province of Corinth was. Gallio saw their wicked rage, and told them, that if Paul had done any bad thing he would have taken notice of it, but as they accused him only about religious matters, he had nothing to do with such disputes, and so he drove the Jews away from his presence. The Greeks, seeing how he treated the Jews, and knowing that they were not now in high favour, immediately fell upon Sosthenes, the chief ruler of the synagogue, and beat him severely ; so that the harm they wanted to do to Paul now fell upon themselves ; "and Gallio cared for none of these things," but looked on with total indifference.

Paul's next journey was into Syria, and he took with him Priscilla and Aquila. Then he came to Ephesus, the metropolis of Asia, where he still reasoned with the Jews, by entering into their synagogue.

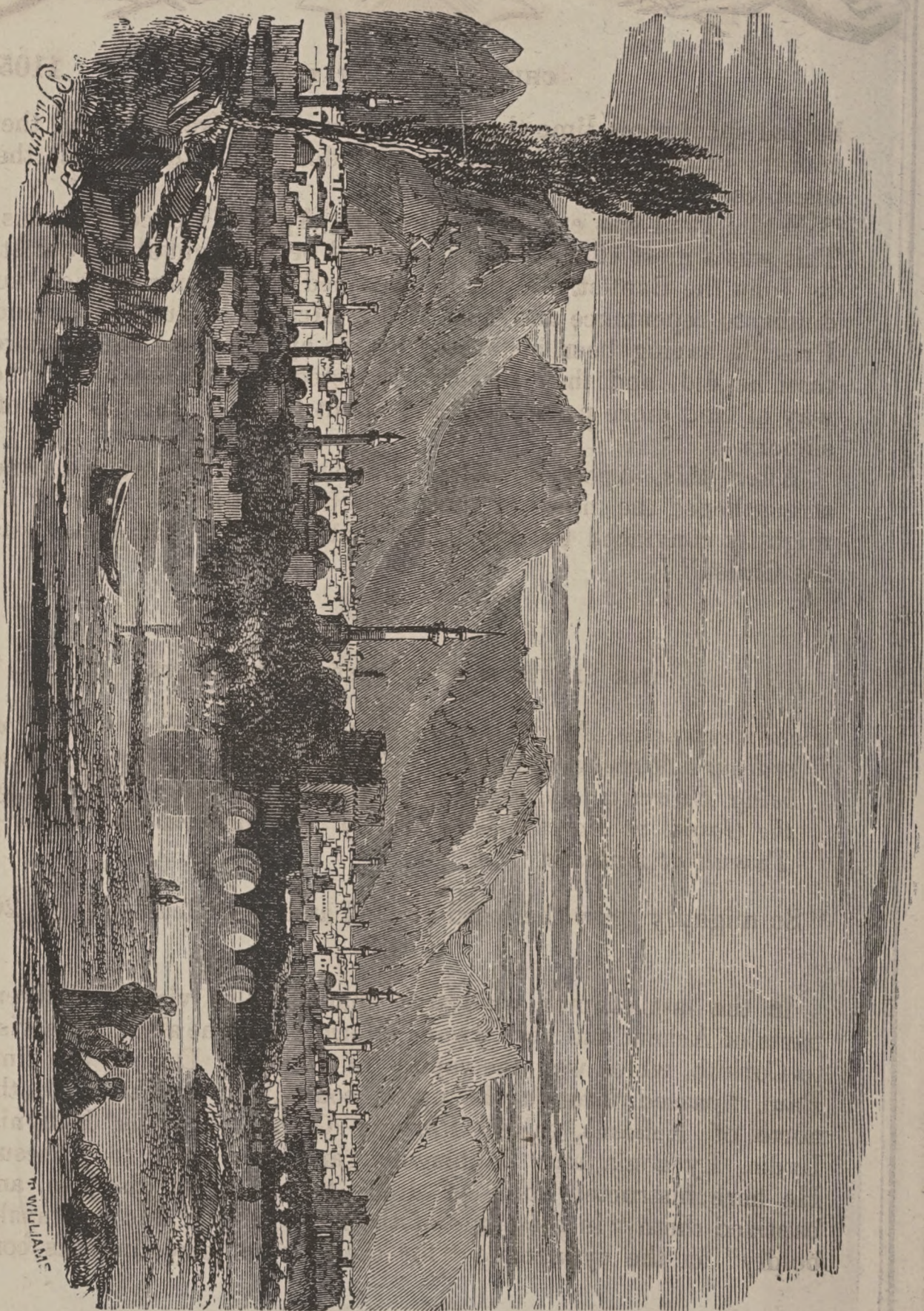
Having left Ephesus, he landed at Cesarea, and visited the Christian church there. Thence he went to Antioch, "and after



1102



THESSALONICA



CITY OF ANTIOCH.

W. WILLIAMS



he had spent some time there, he departed, and went over all the country of Galatia and Phrygia in order, strengthening all the disciples."

While Paul was engaged elsewhere, Apollos visited Ephesus. This was a most eloquent Jew, who had been taught about Christ, by John the Baptist. Here he preached boldly, urging men, no doubt, to repentance and faith in the Messiah. But Aquila and Priscilla having been instructed by the apostle Paul, knew more than he did, and they therefore assisted in showing him "the way of God more perfectly," and about Christ as the Saviour of sinners.

After this, Apollos visited different parts of Achaia, and strengthened the minds of those who believed in Christ, and "he mightily convinced the Jews, and that publicly, that Jesus was the Christ."

THE NINETEENTH CHAPTER OF THE ACTS.

Paul's extensive Travels to preach the Gospel—He works extraordinary Miracles at Ephesus—The seven Sons of Sceva, a Jew, being Exorcists, try to imitate him, and fail—Great Success of the Gospel at Ephesus—Account of Ephesus and its Temple—Tumult at Ephesus.

"So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed."—Verse 20.

In the last chapter we learnt that Apollos visited different parts of Achaia, and here we are informed that he also paid a visit to Corinth, which was the capital of Achaia. During this time Paul "passed through the upper coasts," or countries, to the north of Ephesus, called Phrygia, Galatia, Pontus, Bithynia, Lydia, Lycaonia, and Paphlagonia, and then again to Ephesus. He here instructed some of John the Baptist's disciples, and baptized them "in the name of the Lord Jesus;" and he "spake boldly" in the synagogue "for the space of three months con-





cerning the kingdom of God," that is, the reign of Christ, the Messiah.

However, at length he gave over instructing the Jews in the place, since their hearts were so much hardened against Christ ; and "one Tyrannus" having a school of public instruction and disputation, he went there and taught his disciples about the way of salvation, and in this manner he passed two years. Ephesus being a place of great importance, and numbers of persons, both Jews and Greeks, visiting it for purposes of trade and information, the doctrines of the apostle were heard by most of these, and so conveyed abroad, and spread in all the cities and towns in Asia.

These doctrines received a divine sanction from the miracles which God enabled the apostle to perform as a proof that he was especially commissioned from heaven to preach to the people ; so that "from his body were brought unto the sick handkerchiefs or aprons, and the diseases departed from them, and the evil spirits went out of them." There could be no virtue in these "handkerchiefs or aprons" which had been used by the apostle, but God was pleased to make them the means by which miracles should be performed for the establishing of his truth, and for the honouring of his faithful servant.

Seeing the wonderful things done by the apostle, "some vagabond Jews," who strolled about from place to place, like our vagabond mountebanks, to gain a livelihood by their tricks, and who were "exorcists," or a sort of conjurors, tried to do the like things in a similar way. Among these were seven sons of a Jew, and a "chief among the priests" at Ephesus ; and they attempted to cast out evil spirits from those who were tormented with them, and said, "We adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preacheth." They, however, were soon proved to be impostors, to their injury and shame, and to the honour of the apostle, and advancement of the cause of Christ. The evil spirits, which were obliged to obey the voice of the apostle, being compelled to it by the power of Jesus Christ, would not submit to these impostors ; and one of them said, "Jesus I know, and Paul I know ; but who are ye?" This spirit knew that Jesus was the Son of God, who could





overcome him, and that Paul was his servant, and could do anything he commanded; but these men were not his servants, and why, then, should they dare to turn out a spirit which had taken possession of any man? Enraged at their audacity, the man in whom the evil spirit was, being instigated so to do, rushed upon these men, and, though there were seven of them, they were not strong enough to contend with him, and so were driven out of the house where they were, with their clothes torn off their backs, and themselves bruised and cut with his blows.

This affair was soon spread over the city of Ephesus, and produced a great change in many persons, both among the Jews and Greeks. Indeed, "many of them which used curious arts brought their books together, and burned them before all men; and they counted the price of them, and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver." This was a glorious triumph over Satan in his own territories, for Ephesus was a very wicked and idolatrous city, where magic was taught, and it was a deadly blow to the wicked art when the books were destroyed by which the people had learned how to perform it. The price of the books now burned has been reckoned, at the lowest rate, at seven thousand eight hundred and twelve dollars of our money; but some think it was not less than thirty-one thousand two hundred and fifty dollars. Books were extremely dear before the art of printing was invented, and books on curious arts would be dearer than others.

The apostle Paul now began to think about visiting some other parts, and having decided to go through Macedonia and Achaia, and thence to Jerusalem, and then to Rome, he sent forward Timotheus, or Timothy, to whom he wrote two epistles, and Erastus, who was chamberlain of the city of Corinth, as we learn in the sixteenth chapter of the Romans; and so these gave notice of his visit, and collected the Christians to receive him. While the apostle was about to leave Ephesus, there was, however, "no small stir" about the religion of Jesus; for the makers of images, which the idolatrous people called gods, having lost much of their custom, endeavoured to excite a tumult, and to drive him out of the city.





Before we notice this affair, it may be necessary just to give you a short account of this famous city of Ephesus, and of its celebrated temple.

I have before said that Ephesus was the metropolis of Asia, and, indeed, it was the most famous place of trade in all Asia Minor. The ancient city stood about fifty miles south of Smyrna. It has long gone to decay, like many other once splendid cities of the East. The chief ornament of this city was the Temple of Diana, to erect which all the states in Asia were made to contribute a portion of their wealth. This temple was reckoned one of the wonders of the world. It was nearly as long as St. Paul's Cathedral in London, and nearly as wide as St. Paul's at its greatest breadth. It was supported by one hundred and twenty-seven marble pillars, seventy feet high, or twelve times the height of our tallest men, and these were either most curiously carved or highly polished. From accounts given by ancient writers, this temple was two hundred and twenty years in building, and was continually improved for four hundred years. The imaginary goddess, Diana, was represented by a small statue made of ebony—a hard, black, and valuable wood—and the people were weak enough to believe that this piece of carved wood was sent down to them from heaven by Jupiter, a name by which they distinguished one of the heathen gods, and whom they supposed to be the father of Diana. To this statue, therefore, they paid a great deal of reverence. It had been formerly placed in the trunk of an old elm, but, from the honours paid to it, it was at length provided with this magnificent building. All the inhabitants of Ionia went every year to Ephesus to solemnize a festival to “the great goddess Diana,” and wives and children carried their offerings to her temple, many of which were exceedingly rich and valuable. Priests who officiated on this occasion were liberally supported by the people; and the citizens, no doubt, made much money by the gathering together of so large a number of people, many of whom were wealthy, and who remained during the continuance of the sports which accompanied their offerings. But this temple was destroyed in a very singular manner. Though, on account of its beauty and splendour, the great conqueror, Xerxes, had spared it,





when he overran all the cities in that part, and destroyed all the other temples, this was also doomed to perish. An Ephesian, named Herostratus, or Eratostratus, thought that he should like to make his name renowned through all ages, and in order to do so, he owned, when on the rack, that he fancied he could do nothing better than set fire to this famous fabric. He accomplished his purpose; and the temple, wooden goddess, and all, were burnt to the ground. This was a great loss to the city of Ephesus, and the Ephesians were so enraged, that they got an order published by the government, that his name should never be mentioned in any of the neighbouring kingdoms and nations. The plan of this enthusiast was, however, more effectual than theirs; and if the act of burning down a fine building for so base a purpose, is any honour to his memory, his name still remains, and will probably be recorded in history to the end of time.

This event happened on the very same night in which Alexander the Great was born; and as he was the son of a distinguished prince, the devotees of Diana said that the goddess was absent at his birth, and so it happened that she did not take care of her temple. Alexander, some years after, offered to rebuild this temple at his own expense; but as he wished it to be dedicated to himself, instead of the favourite goddess, the Ephesians cleverly evaded his offer, and told the vain prince it was not fit that one god should build a temple to another.

The Ephesians, however, soon found means to raise a large fund for the purpose of rearing another edifice, even more beautiful than the former. The pillars, and some other materials, had been saved from the flames, and such was the zeal of the people in bringing their offerings towards the new fabric, that the women gave up their gold, silver, and other precious ornaments, and so an immense treasure was soon heaped together. This temple, like the former, was also a wonder of the world, and was held in great veneration. But, like the former, it is also gone to ruins, and travellers can find nothing of it but a few broken pillars. This, then, was the temple which was standing in the days of the apostle Paul.





The throngs that yearly visited Ephesus furnished the silversmiths with plenty of employment to make silver models of this famed building, which they so much venerated, and they brought no small gain to the craftsmen. One of these silversmiths in particular, whose name was Demetrius, called together his fellow-workmen, and told them of the injury they suffered by the reduced sale of their silver temples, in consequence of the apostle Paul having "almost throughout all Asia persuaded and turned away much people, saying, that they be no gods which are made with hands." And he showed that the temple itself was in danger of falling into contempt and neglect, owing to the success of the apostle's preaching. His interested auditors felt the force of what he said, and "they were full of wrath, and cried out, saying, Great is Diana of the Ephesians."

Their noise and shouting roused the whole city, and having put many others into a rage against the apostle's preaching, the mob caught Gaius and Aristarchus, two of Paul's companions, and they rushed with them into the theatre, where public plays were acted in honour of the goddess, and where, among other things, men were set to fight with wild beasts; and very probably it was intended to hurry the servants of Christ thither to throw them to the wild beasts.

Paul, not in the least afraid, would have followed them into the theatre to preach the Gospel even to this enraged multitude; but the rulers at Ephesus advised him not to expose himself to danger, and probably thought the people were not in a mind to attend to anything he might say.

When the people were got together in the theatre, a great many of them did not know why they were there, and as one asked another what was the matter, all were in confusion.

In the meantime, Alexander, who was probably a Jew, was dragged into the theatre, the Jews helping to push him in, and so uniting in their wicked deeds with the Ephesian idolaters. Here Alexander would have spoken to the people, but, when he attempted to speak, the mob drowned his voice, and cried out, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians." They knew that they could





say nothing in their own defence in reply to Alexander, and so for two hours he tried in vain to speak, and they roared out against him.

At length "the town clerk" interfered. This was a person of some influence and authority; and he hit upon a very good method to restore quietness. "Why," said he, "you know that every body worships the goddess Diana, there is no need to dispute about that; and you know that her image came down from Jupiter, and as nobody can contradict it, what need is there of all this noise?" This is just what he would have said in English, for his words are to the same purport. "Besides," he added, "these men have done no harm to our goddess; they have neither robbed the temple of her wealth, nor said anything that I know against her dignity. However, if they have done any harm, the law is ready to appeal to; but if they have not, the injury will fall upon your own heads for disturbing the peace and making this terrible uproar; and if you do not immediately depart quietly home, you will all be in danger of being taken up as rioters." Having spoken to this effect, the people grew a little cool, and seeing that they could do nothing to stop the doctrines of the apostle, and might injure themselves, they quietly departed to their homes.

From this chapter, we, however, learn to be ashamed of ourselves if we do nothing to support the cause of God. See how zealous the Ephesians were for their goddess; what riches they bestowed on the temple; and how ready they were to deny themselves their showy things to rear it again. And shall we say that we love Jesus Christ, and yet give not a single mite, or only give what we can conveniently spare, to promote his cause in the world? My dear young reader, begin to spare something early for him—you cannot begin too soon—and then it will grow into a habit when you attain more advanced age. The temple of Ephesus is indeed destroyed, and "the great goddess Diana" is no more; but there are still millions of idolaters in the world; these have their splendid and wealthy temples, and their cruel and filthy rites. They know not the true God, and interested men keep them in ignorance of him, lest they should lose their employment in their





idolatrous temples. To these we have sent out missionaries, and would send more, if we had the means to do so. If all my readers will contribute, these means will be increased, and we may look for the time when these temples, as well as that of Ephesus, shall fall to ruins.



THE TWENTIETH TO THE TWENTY-SIXTH CHAPTER OF THE ACTS.

Paul visits Troas and preaches till midnight—Eutychus falls from a Window in his Sleep while hearing Paul, and is taken up dead, and restored to life—Paul bids farewell at Miletus to the Elders of the Church at Ephesus—Rhodes and its wonderful Statue—Paul travels to Cesarea, where Agabus prophesies about him—Paul goes to Jerusalem, is ill-treated by the Jews, and given into custody—Ordered to be scourged, but escapes it, pleading he was a Roman citizen—Is carried before the Jewish Sanhedrim—Skilfully divides his Adversaries against each other—Forty Jews take an Oath to kill him—Is carried off in the Night, under a Guard of Soldiers, to Cesarea—Pleads in his Defence in Cour.





PAUL BEFORE THE COUNCIL

J. L. X



PAUL AT JERUSALEM.



before Felix—Conversation with Felix and Drusilla—Kept Prisoner two Years—Tried before Festus—Paul appeals to Cæsar—Pleads his own Cause before King Agrippa.

“Then said Agrippa unto Festus, This man might have been set at liberty if he had not appealed unto Cæsar.”—Chap. xxvi. 32.

We have now to follow the apostle Paul rapidly through some more of his travels; and, except a few occasional remarks, shall merely notice the places where he went, so as to explain their situation and importance, if they have not been noticed before.

Paul, having taken leave of the disciples at Ephesus, now went into Macedonia, and having visited the disciples there—at Philippi, Thessalonica, and Beræa, of which we have lately read—“he came into Greece,” or, as some think, Achaia. Here he remained three months, and was preparing to sail for Syria, when he heard that the Jews were watching for him to kill him if he went in that direction; and so he resolved not needlessly to put himself into danger, but returned by land through Macedonia to visit the churches there. He was now accompanied into Asia by Sopater, of Beræa, and Luke, the writer of the Acts, who includes himself as one of the party when he speaks of “us;” and Aristarchus, and Secundus, of Thessalonica; and Gaius, of Derbe; and Timothy, and Tychicus, and Trophimus, of Asia, went on to prepare matters for the apostle’s reception at Troas. They sailed from Philippi, as the apostle had intended to do, and it being a short way they reached Troas in five days. The apostle, however, was not many hours behind them, since he joined them there and spent a sabbath with them, and they remained there altogether but seven days.

Here the disciples whom the apostle had formerly visited, met together with him and his companions to take the Lord’s supper; and as he had no time to continue with them more than one sabbath day, he was willing to spend as much time as possible in instructing them, while they were equally as desirous of hearing the great truths he had to declare; so he preached to them till midnight.





And now an event took place, which, though at first it seemed very alarming, and might have affected the apostle's credit for preaching at so unseasonable an hour, turned out for the honour of the cause of Christ. A young man, named Eutychus, was sitting near a window, and having fallen asleep, fell from a great height out on the ground below, for the room where they were met for worship was three stories high.

It would not have been much to the credit of this young man that he fell asleep while the apostle was preaching, when he had so few opportunities of hearing him, and when he was now about so soon to depart; nor, indeed, would it have been to his credit to fall asleep in worship at any time; but we may perhaps find a reasonable excuse in the lateness of the hour, and the great warmth of the room, which was lit up with "many lights;" and it is possible, also, he might not be over strong or very well. It does not appear that the apostle reproved him for having done wrong, which he certainly would have done had he thought him to blame. And had there not been some good ground for excuse, it was very disrespectful to the preacher, and would have shown a want of reverence for that Saviour whose Gospel he preached, that he should indulge himself at such a moment in sleep. I have seen grown people and children guilty of this when they could make no excuse. Where the weakness of infancy or age prevails or any bodily infirmity exists, we cannot blame the sleeper; but where it is not so, it is mere mockery to pretend to hear the word of God when we turn the pew into a bed-room.

However, in the case of Eutychus, the apostle felt pity for him, went down, and, falling on him, restored him to life; and to show that he did not think him an unworthy disciple, he took him up with him to the room from which he had fallen, and he was allowed to take the Lord's supper with the disciples of Jesus who were there assembled, "who were not a little comforted" to see a beloved brother in Christ restored to life, and to have such a strong proof of the truth of Paul's doctrine in the miracle which he had now wrought in the name of Jesus; for in his name he always performed his miracles, and not in his own.

The companions of Paul now took a passage in a ship to go





from Troas to Assos, a city of Asia by the sea-side; and here the apostle, having travelled on foot, shortly joined them; when, having been taken into the ship, they sailed for Metelino, a city in Lesbos, an island situated in the Ægean Sea, now known by the name of the Archipelago, being that part of the Mediterranean Sea which divides Greece from Asia Minor. Thence they continued their course "over against Chios," another island in the Ægean Sea, and the next day they reached Samos, another island in the same sea, and anchored or stopped at Trogyllium, a small island near Samos, for there was a bay here convenient for vessels to anchor in; and the next day they came to Miletus, the chief city of Ionia. In his way to this place he passed by Ephesus, for he had determined to sail past it, "because he would not spend the time in Asia," wishing to be at Jerusalem at the great feast of Pentecost, that he might have an opportunity of preaching the Gospel to a great number of Jews, out of all countries, who, he knew, would come to that feast.

Miletus being only about twelve miles from Ephesus, the apostle sent for the elders or managing members of the church in that city, and he most affectionately addressed them, urging them to hold fast their profession of faith in Christ; and he told them this was the last time he should see them, for he knew that he was about to go where he must become a great sufferer and a prisoner for the sake of the Lord Jesus, for whom he was even willing to lay down his life; "and then he kneeled down and prayed with them all." We are not told what his prayer was; but we may readily suppose that it was one of the most earnest, affectionate, and tender prayers that was ever offered up to God, for he seemed to love the Ephesians most sincerely, and was deeply concerned for their happiness; "and they all wept sore, and fell on Paul's neck and kissed him." In this way Esau fell on Jacob's neck, and Joseph on his brother Benjamin's; it was, as you have heard before, the eastern way of showing great affection.

Having parted with these elders, who accompanied Paul to the ship, and did not leave him till the very last moment, he and his





companions sailed straight for Coos, or Cos, another island in the Ægean Sea, and the day following they reached Rhodes, a celebrated island, which had a city of the same name. Here was that famous statue called the Colossus of the Sun, which was twelve years in making, and cost three hundred talents. It was seventy cubits high. I have several times said that a cubit is the length of a man's arm from the elbow to the end of his middle finger. As it lay along it astonished all beholders, for few men with their arms stretched out could embrace the thumb.

They next proceeded to a place called Patara, a city of Lycia, which was a country of Asia Minor, bounded on the south by the Mediterranean. Here they found a ship for Phœnicia, and thither they sailed, and passing Cyprus stood for Syria, and landed at Tyre, the chief city of Phœnicia. Having met with some Christians here, they stayed to establish them in their faith, and were with them seven days.

Then they sailed from Tyre to Ptolemais, a city of Galilee, on the sea-coast, where they remained with some fellow Christians during one day. And the day following Paul's company stopped at Cesarea, "and entered into the house of Philip the Evangelist," undoubtedly the same who had baptized the eunuch, and there they took up their abode while they remained in that place. It is worthy of remark, that Philip had four daughters who had the gift of prophecy, or were inspired by the Holy Spirit to foretell events which should happen to the church of Christ.

While the apostolical travellers were at Cesarea, the prophet Agabus arrived from Judea, and foretold the treatment Paul would meet with from the Jews at Jerusalem; at the same time taking the girdle which fastened Paul's robes round his body, he expressed it by the significant sign of binding his own hands and feet. This made Paul's companions weep and entreat him not to go to Jerusalem; but the holy servant of God, bent upon the conversion of men, would not be dissuaded from his purpose on so important an occasion, when thousands of Jews would be collected together at the feast, and he answered, "What mean ye to weep and to break my heart? for I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus."





Shortly after this the party took their carriages, or rather, "their baggage," and went to Jerusalem, accompanied by some disciples of Cesarea, and one Mnason of Cyprus, an old disciple, who happened to reside at Jerusalem, and who accommodated them at his house.

Here Paul was gladly received by the brethren, and rejoiced their hearts by telling them how successful his preaching had been in the conversion of the Gentiles. These in turn told him of many thousands of Jews, who believed in Christ at Jerusalem, great numbers of which, you remember, were converted immediately after the ascension of Christ. These Jews had, however, still some prejudices in favour of their ancient customs, and did not like, among other things, to give up circumcision. To meet their prejudices, or soften them down so that they should not feel angry at Paul, and so be indisposed to hear his preaching, the disciples advised him to yield in some things, which, though unnecessary, had no harm in them; and as four men were performing the ceremonies of a vow, and purifying themselves after the manner of the old ceremonial law, they begged of Paul to do the same with them. The apostle, who was willing to become "all things to all men," so that he might win their souls for Christ, agreed to this proposal, and passed through the forms of the vow.

After this he visited the temple, where the Jews "laid hands on him," and treated him so cruelly, that they would have killed him, had not the chief captain rushed in among them with some soldiers and rescued him. He, however, supposed, from their treating Paul in this manner, that he might have been doing something wrong, and ordered him to be bound with chains, and so the prophecy of Agabas came to pass exactly as he had spoken it.

Paul was now, with some difficulty, carried prisoner to the castle, for the Jews still pressed upon him to murder him. Here he conversed with the captain, who fancied he might be an Egyptian robber that had done much mischief, and accompanied by four thousand desperate men had lately troubled the neighbouring country. Paul then informed him that he was mistaken, for





he was a citizen of Tarsus, no mean city in Cilicia, and begged to be allowed to address the people, which he did, as he stood on the steps of the ascent to the castle. He then told them that he was brought up "at the feet of Gamaliel," a learned Jew; that is, he sat to receive his instructions, as scholars then sat beneath their masters; that he had been as zealous as any Jew could be in behalf of his religion, but that he was converted on his way to Damascus as he was going to persecute the Christians, and that now he was an apostle of Jesus Christ, sent to preach to the Gentiles. This they could not bear, for they fancied themselves to be the only people whom God would honour with a divine message; and now again they broke out into a rage and tumult. The chief captain then ordered Paul to be scourged; but while they were binding him, he said that he was a Roman citizen; and it was a great crime to scourge such a person without a trial. Tarsus was a free city, and Paul's parents being citizens of Tarsus, he was born free; so Paul escaped being scourged, and the captain was greatly frightened that he had even bound him, for it was also a great offence against the Roman law to bind a Roman citizen.

On the morrow, Paul was taken before the chief priests and council, or Jewish sanhedrim. While he was attempting to address them, the high priest, Ananias, commanded some to give him a slap in the face, which the apostle resented as a violation of the law, and called the priest a whited wall, meaning that he was an hypocrite, looking fair without but bad within. The Jews then reproved him for reviling God's high priest, when he acknowledged that he would not have done it, but he was not aware that he was the high priest.

The apostle, finding that the Jews would not hear him, wisely bethought himself to divide his enemies among themselves; and as one thing which had offended the Jews was his preaching the resurrection of Jesus, he called out that he was brought there for professing his hope in the resurrection of the dead. Now the Sadducees denied that there was any resurrection, but the Pharisees believed it, and immediately, as Paul had foreseen, they fell





out among themselves; and the scribes in the council, who were Pharisees, declared that Paul was unjustly accused.

As the parties became violent, Paul's life was in danger amongst them, and the chief captain, now fearing the consequences of his being injured as a Roman citizen, commanded the soldiers again to rescue him and take him into the castle. Here Jesus appeared to him in a vision, and told him he must preach his Gospel yet at Rome.

Above forty of the Jews, enraged at the deliverance of the apostle, now took a solemn oath that they would neither eat nor drink till they had killed Paul; and they proposed to the chief priests and elders, that if they would make an excuse to have him once more before the council, they would take care that he should not again escape alive. However, God defeated their wicked purpose, for, providentially, a sister of Paul's had a son at Jerusalem, who, having learned the intended plot of these men, went himself and informed the apostle, who sent him to tell the chief captain. The captain lost no time in protecting him, and ordered a body of soldiers to take him at night to Cesarea, a place which was seventy-five miles from Jerusalem, and where Felix resided, who was governor of Judea. The captain, whose name was Claudius Lysias, also sent a favourable letter to Felix, which you may read in the twenty-third chapter.

At Cesarea Paul was kept for five days in "Herod's judgment hall," or court for holding trials. At the end of this time Ananias, the high priest, and the elders had travelled from Jerusalem, accompanied by an orator, or sort of counsellor, named Tertullus, for the purpose of prosecuting Paul. Tertullus, appearing in court, delivered a very flattering speech to Felix, and then accused Paul of being "a pestilent fellow, and a mover of seditions," and "a ringleader of the Nazarenes," a name of contempt given by the Jews to the Christians, derived from Jesus being brought up at Nazareth. Paul, in reply, defended himself with great eloquence, and his speech agreed with what the captain had said about him in his letter. Felix would not, therefore, hastily condemn him, but put off the business till he had inquired and thought more about it, and had seen the chief captain, who could more particu-





larly explain what he knew of the matter. In the mean time he ordered a centurion to keep guard over Paul, but allowed him to go unfettered, and to see any of his friends.

Some days afterwards Felix, accompanied by his wife Drusilla, sent for Paul, and had some private conversation with him, "concerning the faith in Christ." His wife was a Jewess, the daughter of Herod Agrippa, who was eaten by worms, and sister of the king called Agrippa; and probably Felix wished to satisfy his curiosity, and that of his wife, about the new faith, which she could better understand than he, knowing something about the prophecies of the Messiah. Paul's reasoning was most powerful; and while he took this opportunity of striking at some vices which he knew had disgraced the character of Felix, and showed him that, though a ruler himself, he must be judged at last for all his crimes before the Judge of the whole earth; the guilty "Felix trembled," and then put off the conversation for another opportunity; but he lulled his conscience to rest and never met Paul again, except on common matters, when he hoped he might bribe him to gain his liberty.

In this unjust manner was Paul kept a prisoner during two years, when Porcius Festus was appointed governor of Judea in the room of Felix. Felix did not even then set the apostle at liberty, but left Paul bound, to please the Jews. This was, however, of no advantage to him, for he was himself accused by some of the Jews of oppressive conduct, and taken before Cæsar, to answer for his own real offences; and had it not been that he had a brother named Pallas, who had great influence in the court, he would have been severely punished.

The new governor, Festus, arriving at Jerusalem, the Jews had great hopes that they should now accomplish their wicked purposes against Paul; and "the high priest and chief of the Jews" even begged it as a favour of Festus, that he would send for Paul back to the sanhedrim at Jerusalem to be tried, where they would not have failed to have murdered him. Festus, however, thought he would first go to Cesarea, and inquire into the merits of the case, and he wished the Jews to accompany him thither, and bring





forward their charges against Paul. On reaching Cesarea, he took his seat as judge, and the apostle was brought before him; but his accusers were not able to prove anything against him. Notwithstanding this, the wicked governor, who ought to have set him free, proposed, after all, to send him before the sanhedrim, wishing by so doing to gratify the great persons among the Jews. Paul, however, again took shelter under his rights as a Roman citizen, and demanded that he should at once go before the emperor, or Cæsar, Nero then reigning at Rome, which completely defeated the malicious schemes of his adversaries, and left no means of evasion for Festus.

Agrippa, who ruled over some of the small states in that part, with the title of king, and his sister Bernice, came now to pay a visit to Festus, and congratulate him on his new dignity. Festus told Agrippa how much he was perplexed about Paul, that he had been tried before him and appeared to be an innocent man; but that, as the matters in dispute were chiefly things which concerned the Jews, and which he did not well understand, he had wished to have sent him before the sanhedrim, but Paul had resolved to appeal to Cæsar.

Agrippa, being a Jew, had his curiosity excited, and wished to examine Paul himself; so he was, on the next day, brought before the public court, where Agrippa, and Festus, and Bernice, and all "the chief captains and principal men of the city," were assembled together. Festus then openly declared his opinion of Paul's innocence; but since he had appealed to Cæsar he said he must now send him to Rome, but he really did not know what to say to the emperor as an excuse for sending him thither. He had, therefore, assembled this court for advice, and especially wished for that of Agrippa, an illustrious person, and who was capable of entering better into the matters in dispute.

After Festus had spoken, Agrippa told Paul he might speak; when the apostle again eloquently pleaded his own cause, stated his early life, his conversion, his mission to the Gentiles, his sufferings from the Jews, and the doctrines which he preached. At length he was suddenly interrupted by Festus, who said, with





a loud voice, "Paul, thou art beside thyself, much learning hath made thee mad." To whom Paul replied, that he was perfectly in his senses, and his doctrines were the words of truth. The apostle also so closely pressed his address upon Agrippa, that he forced him to cry out, "Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian." Alas, my young reader, there are but too many like Agrippa who are "almost" persuaded to be Christians, but not altogether: they see much that is lovely in Christ and his religion, but they cannot bear to be accounted singular for his sake, to deny themselves a life of worldly pleasure, and give up their sins, and break with their evil companions, and so they die as heathens or Jews; for, though from custom they may be *called* Christians, that does not make them so, and no man is a Christian unless he studies daily to be more and more like Christ. Every Christian feels that, notwithstanding the hatred of the world, it is a great honour and happiness to bear the name of Christ; and with this feeling Paul said to the king, "I would to God that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost and altogether such as I am, except these bonds."

After breaking up the council, Agrippa told Festus, that if Paul had not appealed to Cæsar, he should certainly have advised his being set at liberty, for he was, without doubt, an innocent man.

THE TWENTY-SEVENTH AND TWENTY-EIGHTH CHAPTERS OF
THE ACTS.

Paul's dangerous Voyage to Rome—Is shipwrecked—His Miracles at Melita—Preaches in his own House at Rome, and converts great Numbers to Christ.

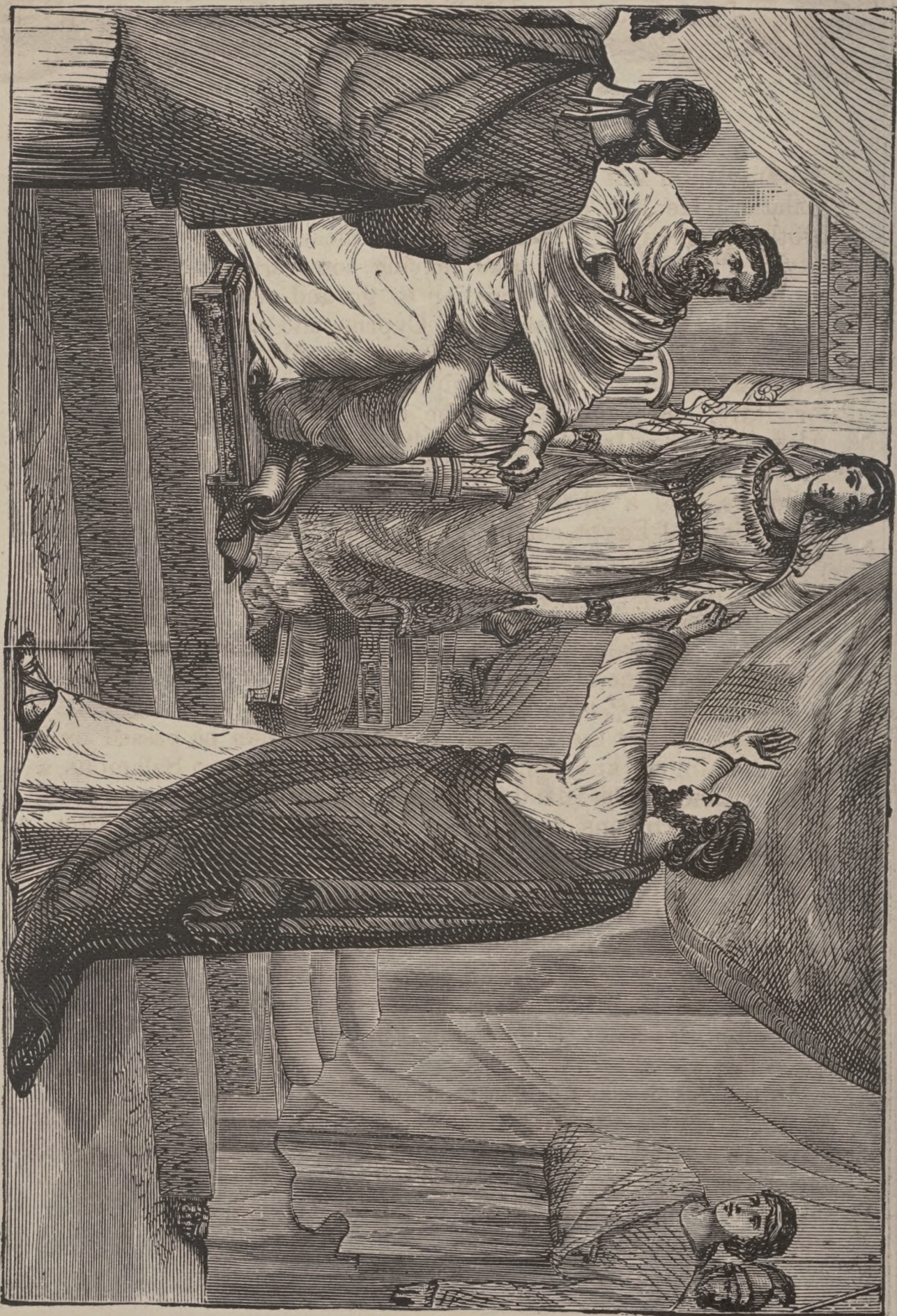
"Some on boards, and some on broken pieces of the ship, and so it came to pass that they escaped all safe to land."—
Chap. xxvii. 44.

Paul was now given in charge of Julius, a Roman centurion, and sent on board a ship of Adramyttium to sail for Rome.





XXIX



PAUL BEFORE AGRIPPA



Adramyttium was a sea-port town in Mysia, a country adjoining Galatia. He was accompanied in his voyage by a Christian brother named Aristarchus. They touched at Sidon, a famous city of Phœnicia, where Paul having some friends, Julius handsomely allowed him permission to go and visit them. Thence they sailed under the island of Cyprus, and crossed the sea of Cilicia and Pamphylia, and then came to Myra, a city of Lycia. Here the centurion found a ship of Alexandria which was bound for Italy. Alexandria was the chief city of Egypt, built by Alexander the Great, immediately after his conquest of Egypt. and it was peopled with Greeks. It had many magnificent buildings, and a library, built by Ptolemy Philadelphus, one of the kings of Egypt, containing seven hundred thousand volumes, which was, unfortunately burnt in a war between Julius Cæsar, who was the Roman emperor, and Pompey, a great Roman general.

In order to make a short cut to Italy, the master of the ship now stood towards Cnidus, a place in Asia Minor, but the wind being contrary, he altered his course, and so sailed below Crete, one of the noblest isles in the Mediterranean Sea, which is now better known by the name of Candia, and then he passed over against Salmone, known latterly by the name of Capo Salamone, a piece of land in the island of Crete. They next came to a place called Fair Havens, near Lasea, a city on the sea-shore of Crete.

Having lost much time in sailing slowly against the wind, or stopping at the Fair Havens, the captain wished to proceed on his voyage, although the time of the year was now very unfavourable. Paul advised the centurion not to proceed, for there was great danger; but the captain persisted, and in the end found he had done wrong in not taking the apostle's advice. Rash people have often to repent of not taking kind and wise advice, when it is too late.

As the haven was not commodious to winter in, they proceeded on their course towards Phenice, a haven of Crete, having a favourable wind. In a short time, however, the wind changed, and "a tempestuous wind" blew, "called Euroclydon." Here the ship becoming unmanageable, was let to take her own course, when she ran under an island called Clauda. Fearing they





should be wrecked, with some difficulty they secured their boat to go ashore, and they passed ropes and chains round about the ship to keep her from going to pieces, and they took down their sails, and so were driven about in the sea wherever the wind might bear them, having only what the sailors call bare poles.

Still the tempest increased, and it was found necessary to throw every thing burdensome overboard to lighten the ship, that she might the more easily float on the tossing waves. The sailors, in that age, steered their course by the sun, moon, and stars; but the skies were so darkened by this storm, and that for many days, that they could see none of the heavenly bodies, and therefore knew not whither they went; and in this uncertain state they gave themselves up for lost, expecting that the ship must at last strike on rocks or quicksands.

While they were all in a state of despair, God showed Paul in a vision that he should not perish by the storm, but should yet bear witness to his truth before Cæsar at Rome. Then Paul told his companions that they would have acted wisely to take his advice; however, now they must be shipwrecked, but their lives would all be saved.

On the fourteenth night the seamen found, by sounding, that they were approaching some land, and so to prevent their falling upon the rocks they cast anchor. Sounding is done by dropping a weighted line into the sea, and, if it soon reaches the bottom, the sailors can tell on a dark night that they are near some shore. Casting anchor is throwing an iron, with sharp-barbed points, and fastened to a long rope, into the sea; and the anchor sticking fast at the bottom, and the rope being fastened to the ship, it cannot be easily moved from its place. In this case four anchors were lowered to hold the ship the more firm.

The sailors now attempted to escape for their lives, and were stealing off with the boat, when Paul declared that their continuance was absolutely necessary to save the rest; so the soldiers cut the rope by which the boat was tied to the ship, and let it go, that the sailors might not get into it.

They had now all fasted a long time, and the apostle urged them to eat before the ship was wrecked, and to gather a little





strength for the toils they would have to undergo; and then he solemnly gave God thanks before them all, and began himself to eat. We ought never to take our food without giving God thanks; for, as good Mr. Henry says, we cannot put a morsel of food into our mouths till God first puts it into our hands.

The number of the crew and passengers was two hundred and seventy-six. Having satisfied their appetites, the last thing which they could do to lighten the ship was to throw away the wheat and provisions; this they now did.

At day-light they saw a little creek of water, with a shore, and taking up the anchors, hoisted a sail, and tried to run the ship in. In doing this they ran upon some sands, where two seas met, and the fore part stuck fast, but the hinder part was broken by the furious waves.

The soldiers now proposed to kill the prisoners, lest any of them should escape, and they should be answerable for them; and the apostle Paul was to have been killed among the rest. But the centurion, who, by this time, greatly respected Paul, opposed the wicked, cruel, and ungrateful scheme; he, therefore, ordered those who could swim to escape to the shore, and that the others should ride on boards and broken pieces of timber from the ship, and escape the best way they could; and so they all got "safe to land."

The place at which they landed was called Melita, which has generally been supposed to be the island now called Malta. Here the natives, though uncivilized, showed the shipwrecked mariners a great deal of kindness; and as it was rainy, and they were fatigued and cold, they made a fire to warm them. As all helped to gather wood for it, Paul had also gathered a bundle, and while he was laying it on the fire a viper came out of it, being driven by the heat, and fastened upon his hand. The bite of this serpent is exceedingly venomous, and its poison the most dangerous. The natives, being very superstitious, thought that this was a judgment on Paul, whom they took for some murderer that God was now punishing, though he had escaped shipwreck. Paul





shook off the reptile into the fire, and they all looked on expecting to see him fall down dead ; but when they saw he had received no hurt, they then looked upon him as no less than a god.



This island had a governor named Publius, who very hospitably received the unfortunate strangers. But his hospitality was well repaid ; for the father of Publius, lying at the time sick of a fever, Paul “prayed, and laid his hands on him and healed him.” As soon as this was known, many others applied for and obtained cures, and so the apostle and his companions had much respect on the island during the time of their stay, and received every thing they needed to help them on their voyage.

Here they remained during three months, when they sailed in a ship of Alexandria, which had wintered in the isle. They next landed at Syracuse, a famous city in Sicily, where they stopped three days. They then sailed round Sicily, and came to Rhegium, a city in Calabria ; thence to Puteoli, a large sea-port town not far from where Naples now stands ; here Paul met with some Christian brethren, and staid seven days with them, Julius most probably kindly consenting to gratify their wishes that Paul might so stay. Thence they went to Appii Forum, which was fifty miles from Rome, and to which place some of the Christians of Rome, hearing of their approach, went to meet the Apostle, as others did also at the Three Taverns, which was thirty miles from Rome. The sight of these Christians greatly encouraged Paul's heart, for





he was glad to see they were not ashamed of him as a prisoner for the cause of Christ.

On arriving at Rome, Paul was allowed to have an apartment to himself, that he might not be annoyed by the common prisoners; perhaps he owed this favour to the kindness of Julius, the centurion, who had behaved towards him very handsomely throughout his whole voyage. He had, however, a soldier with him, and, according to the Roman custom, this man was constantly chained to the apostle, as men are handcuffed together in our country.

Here Paul sent for the Jews at Rome, and told them how unjustly he had been treated by their brethren, and how he had been obliged to appeal to Cæsar; and he informed them about Christ, the true Messiah; and finding them disposed to hear him he met many that visited him, and instructed them in the gospel, and numbers of them believed in Jesus. "And Paul dwelt two whole years in his own hired house, and received all that came in unto him, preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him."





THE
EPISTLES OF PAUL THE APOSTLE.

“Ye see how large a letter I have written unto you with mine own hand.”—Galatians, chap. vi. 11.

THE apostles not only visited the Christians at different places, but, when they were absent, wrote letters to them to instruct them in the knowledge of Christ. These having been collected together, are given us in the New Testament, and we have the Epistles to the Romans, Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians; to Timothy, a disciple of Christ, and pupil of the apostle Paul; to Titus, an evangelist, or preacher of the Gospel; and to the Hebrews. All these except the Hebrews are known to have been written by St. Paul. The Epistle of James was written by that apostle, as were also the Epistles of Peter by Peter, and of John by John, and the Epistle of Jude by Jude. Be it remembered these were not written with verses, but in one continued letter each, the verses being a modern invention to assist us in making our references; and hence it is sometimes necessary to read on from the end of one chapter to the beginning of another, to understand its full meaning.

THE EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS.

This Epistle is placed first in the list of the Epistles, probably because Rome was a place of very great importance, but the Epistles to the Thessalonians, Corinthians, and the First Epistle to Timothy, and that to Titus, were all written before it.

The Epistle itself shows that the apostle Paul had never seen the Roman Christians when he wrote to them, but he felt a great interest in them; and they must have loved him much for it, for





they travelled from thirty to fifty miles from that city to meet him, when he was going as a prisoner there.

You are not to suppose from the title, that the people to whom this epistle was written were native Romans; some of them were so, and were converted from heathenism,—but they were merely persons dwelling in Rome, most of whom were converted Jews. The apostle calls them neither Jews nor Romans, but addressed them, as “all that be at Rome, beloved of God, called to be Saints.”

The chief design of this Epistle was to show these dwellers at Rome and us, how a poor sinner may be justified or accounted righteous and good in the sight of God. Then, as in the other Epistles, after having explained the grand subject he had in his mind, he exhorts the Christians to practise various duties. These duties are named frequently in his various Epistles, and are such as, obedience to parents and rulers, respect to ministers, kindness and charity toward each other, and love to all saints. There are also various remembrances desired to be given from him to different persons, just as we now send our love and kind regards when we write to friends, and beg them to give them for us to other friends where they reside. In the close of this Epistle, it is written, “I Tertius, who wrote this epistle, salute you in the Lord.” This merely means that he was employed by the apostle Paul to write down the Epistle, which was frequently the case, though sometimes, as in the passage quoted at the head of this chapter, from the Galatians, he wrote the whole with his own hand. The words were, however, at all times, those of the apostle himself.

I do not intend to go through these chapters as we did those on history, but only to notice such terms as it may be desirable for you fully to understand in reading them for yourself.

First chapter and first verse. “Apostle.” This word means “sent,” and the name is more especially given to the twelve persons who were sent forth by Jesus Christ himself in person, to preach his gospel. Paul was, however, numbered along with the apostles, for he saw our Lord alive after his crucifixion, which was one very necessary qualification, that he, like the rest, might bear testimony to his resurrection.

Seventh verse. “Saints.” We have before observed, that a saint





means a holy person. On this account the name was given, by the early Christians, to those holy men of God who wrote the New Testament Scripture. When it is used by the apostles, it always means pious people. Wicked persons, who despise religion will sometimes use the term by way of ridicule, but we should never be ashamed of being called "Saints;" it is the most honourable title we can bear, and the only reason for shame is that we deserve it so little.

Third chapter and twentieth verse. "Justified."—This is a term used in law. When a person is tried by the judge, if he is found innocent, he is acquitted and justified; if guilty, he is sentenced and condemned. The apostle proves in this Epistle, that all men are guilty before God. The breaker of human laws has become guilty, and is condemned; and so the breaker of God's laws is guilty and condemned. He has broken the law,—can never be saved by keeping it in future, even if he were to do so; because his future obedience will not excuse him for doing what was wrong before. But the apostle shows us how we can be saved, by the obedience of another who has never broken the law, and by his making satisfaction for what we have done. No one but Jesus Christ could do this, being the Son of God in our nature; and his righteousness or merit becomes ours, if we truly believe or trust in him as our Saviour. Thus we become justified by faith in him, and for his sake we are no longer accounted guilty, and are freed from condemnation. This is the chief argument used by the Apostle, in the Epistle to the Romans.

Twenty-fourth verse. "Redemption." This is a word to set forth our salvation. It means a release from captivity. The sinner is a slave to sin and to Satan, and a prisoner under the law of God, which he has broken. From all this evil Christ trusted in by real faith, sets the soul free. Captives were often redeemed by money, but we "are not redeemed by such corruptible things as silver and gold," but "by the precious blood of Christ." The blood of Christ was considered as a price paid to Divine justice to release us from guilt, and so from condemnation; and by trusting in Christ alone for salvation, we become free from all the claims for satisfaction from a broken law, and are saved from the power





of sin and Satan; "being justified freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus."

Twenty-fifth verse. "Propitiation." This is another word which is often used in the Epistles, and which should be well understood, or we cannot understand them. To propitiate, is to make any one gracious. Christ was our "propitiation," because by his death he made God gracious to sinners. He then made propitiation for us, and covered our guilt, as the mercy-seat, or propitiatory, did the tables of the law, in the tabernacle, of which we read in the beginning of the Old Testament.

"Remission" is another word we must understand, and it means here forgiveness.

Eighth chapter and fifteenth verse. "Adoption." We must know what this means. In various ancient nations it was a custom for those persons who had no children to possess their wealth and estates after they died, to choose some one as their child. The person chosen then gave up his family for ever, and took the name of the one he entered, and was made the lawful heir by adoption, as though he had been born the son of the party that adopted him. The persons adopting took all possible care of the new member of their family, and the new member loved and respected them in return. Thus when God's grace touches the heart of a sinner, he who was by nature "a child of wrath even as others," becomes a child of God. "As many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name." God then owns them, and treats them as his dear children, and they, having "the Spirit of adoption"—the spirit of one made a child of God—cry, "Abba, Father." They call God Father, and they look to him as their gracious Father in heaven, loving him with all their heart, and trusting in him for every good thing which they really need. The apostle used two words here which mean the same thing; Abba is the word by which the Jews called God Father, and the other word represents that by which the Gentiles called him Father, and so they mean, that though using different words, yet both Jew and Gentile, that trust in Christ, and come to God by him, are alike made his dear children.





Twenty-ninth verse. "Predestinate" means to determine and appoint long before the doing of a thing. Properly speaking, God can predestinate, but men cannot, they can only intend to do a thing; for what God purposes to do, he can and will certainly do; but no man is sure of living to do what he intends, or if he lives, he is not sure but something may defeat his purpose.

"Called." This term means calling a sinner to forsake his wicked ways, and to give himself up to the service of God, and this in such a way that he hears the call which God's Spirit speaks to his heart, and he willingly obeys and forsakes sin, and serves God.

Thirty-third verse. "Elect." This word means chosen. Those whom God loves.

Twelfth chapter and first verse. "A living sacrifice." This verse is remarkable. "I beseech you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service." A sacrifice is properly an animal offered to God, and slain for the purpose. Such was a sacrifice according to the law in the Leviticus. A living sacrifice, therefore, seems a contradiction, but it means a lasting or perpetual sacrifice. The victim was offered up and the sacrifice was over; but we are to offer up ourselves to God continually, to be always devoted or given to him.

THE FIRST AND SECOND EPISTLES TO THE CORINTHIANS.

Corinth has been noticed when we treated on the Acts. It was a large and crowded city, and the capital or chief city of Achaia; and Achaia was a country in Greece. The apostle Paul was at this place about two years, and having converted many Jews and Gentiles, and left them united together in a Christian Church, he now wrote to them to correct some wrong things which he heard were practised among them.

Corinth was celebrated for its games, called the Isthmian games, because the place itself stood on an isthmus, or neck of land joining it to a continent, or very large quantity of land, containing





many countries. These games were practised every fourth year. There were other games of a similar kind celebrated in Greece, called the Olympic, Pythian, and Nemæan. Those who engaged in these games were trained for twelve months before; and they had suitable food and exercise, to prevent them from growing too fat, or too indolent, and so becoming unfit to endure the hardships they had to undergo; for they had to run, to wrestle, to leap, and to box. The boxers used their arms, frequently beating the air, as if they were beating their opponents, that so they might be skilful and strong. The path of the racers was marked out by white lines, or posts; he who did not keep within them, though he was first at the goal, or winning post, lost the prize. Garlands or crowns made of pine-leaves, olives, laurel, and parsley, were given the conquerors by the judges appointed to decide who had won; and other honours and privileges belonged to them. Large numbers of spectators were present to see these games, which drew as much attention in Greece, as the greatest sights do among us.

The apostle Paul often alludes to these games, to show how much the Christian should struggle, by prayer, self-denial, and other means, against sin, in order to obtain superior honours. So you will, from knowing what has been here mentioned about them, understand his meaning in many parts of his Epistles, where otherwise it would not have appeared quite plain. The following texts are among those in which the apostle alludes to these games.

First Corinthians, ninth chapter and twenty-fourth and following verses. "Know ye not that they which run in a race, run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain. And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown, but we an incorruptible. I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air: but I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection; lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway."

The fifth chapter of Galatians, and the seventh verse. "Ye did run well; who did hinder you, that ye should not obey the truth?"

The second chapter of Philippians, and the sixteenth verse.





"Holding forth the word of life; that I may rejoice in the day of Christ, that I have not run in vain, neither laboured in vain." Here the apostle means to say, that with all the ardour of a racer in the games, he had striven to win souls for Christ. That the winning of these was his prize, in which he rejoiced, and should rejoice yet more, when at the judgment day he should see them safe, body and soul, in heaven; and that their shining in the purity of Christians by the holiness of their lives, was to him the best ground of hope that he had not run in vain for this prize.

The third chapter of the same Epistle, and the thirteenth and fourteenth verses. "This one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark, for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." The mark was a pole, fixed in the ground, sometimes with the crown at the top, which the victor gained for his prize.

The twelfth chapter of the Hebrews, and first verse. "Wherefore seeing we also are encompassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us." By laying aside every weight, means throwing off every pleasure and pursuit that is likely to encumber us in running on for the prize of heavenly glory, just as a racer would throw off any garment or burden that was likely to hinder him in winning in the Isthmian games.

Some other Scriptures in the Corinthians just need a brief explanation.

First Corinthians, third chapter and second verse. "I have fed you with milk, and not with meat." The apostle here speaks in a figure, as he often does, and as he does when he refers to the games. By milk he means teaching some simple truths of religion; and by meat he means some more difficult truths, which it required more time to understand.

Sixteenth verse. "Ye are the temple of God." God's holy presence was in the temple of Solomon, where his people worshipped; and so it is in the heart of every good man, just as it was in the temple, cheering him and blessing him.





Fifteenth chapter and thirty-second verse. "I have fought with beasts at Ephesus." The apostle, when persecuted, was made either to fight with wild beasts at Ephesus, a wicked city,—or, he speaks in a figure, in which he calls wicked men who persecuted him by the name of beasts; as David sometimes does in the Psalms. Some of the ancient nations had large places built in the shape of a circle or oval, called Amphitheatres, with seats raised all around, one above another; and here they exhibited fights between wild beasts, and men who were obliged to fight them for their lives; the battle being fought on the ground in the centre. Christians were very commonly sentenced by the heathen to be given to the beasts. Let us praise God that our true love to Jesus Christ is not now tried by so hard a test; if it were, we ought rather to die for him who died for us, than to dishonour him.

THE EPISTLE TO THE GALATIANS.

Galatia was a province of Asia Minor, and this Epistle was not written to the inhabitants of any particular city or town, but to the Christians in the whole province. It is not certain by whom their several churches were founded, but it is thought probable that they were founded by the apostle. The reason why the Epistle was written was this: some converted Jews had joined the Galatians, and not having a clear knowledge of the gospel of Christ, had taught them they must in becoming Christians, attend to some things which were peculiar to the religion of the Jews. Now as Christ had done away with all the rites of the Jewish Church, which were only shadows or types and figures of the spiritual worship of his new church, this was a great mistake; and the apostle wrote to correct it.

THE EPISTLE TO THE EPHESIANS.

Some account of the city of Ephesus has been given in the remarks on the nineteenth chapter of the Acts. The apostle Paul





went to this city after he had been at Corinth, but he made only a short stay. The next time he visited it he found twelve disciples, and made many more. He continued two or three years, and formed a Christian church, to whom this Epistle was written. The apostle foresaw that teachers of untruths would spring up after his death, and his design in writing to the Ephesians was to fix their minds in the pure truths of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Two passages in this Epistle may require notice.

The second chapter and first verse. "And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins." Here you will observe, that the words "hath he quickened," are printed in italic letters, which means, that in translating them into English, from the Greek language, in which the Epistles were written, these italic words are added by the translator. The reason for his adding them was, to supply what was evidently omitted, and so to make sense. In the second chapter of Colossians, and the thirteenth verse, the whole meaning is translated exactly from the Greek original, so that the addition here is clearly what the apostle meant. You will frequently see these *italics*, and now remember that they are always to show that the words are added by the translator to make sense. I am not sure whether I have before mentioned this. The meaning of this text is, "To you God hath given spiritual life, to live to his glory, who were before as those who are dead, and never loved and served God, being senseless about good things, as dead persons are senseless to every thing."

Sixth chapter and thirteenth verse. "Take unto you the whole armour of God." There are many figures used by the apostle Paul which are so evident, that they need not be explained; or else of such a nature, that they can only be well understood by persons of riper years. These are therefore passed over for the sake of brevity. "The whole armour of God" is here mentioned, "truth," "righteousness," &c., compared to the military girdle of the ancient warrior, and the breastplate and other parts of his armour, from the various uses of these to protect him. Though our soldiers are not now so clad, yet you must have often seen pictures representing these warriors armed from top to toe; some of the





royal guards are also still partly dressed in this manner, and men in complete armour may have been seen by the young reader, if a resident in London ; as they usually form a part of the procession on Lord Mayor's day. As the ancient warriors were thus protected against the swords, and spears, and darts of their foes, so the apostle exhorts all Christians to guard themselves against the different attacks which Satan, the enemy of mankind, will be making against their purity, and peace, and happiness.

THE EPISTLE TO THE PHILIPPIANS.

You read something about Philippi in the commentary on the sixteenth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles. Philippi was a Roman colony, or place far from Rome, inhabited by Romans who had gone thither to live. It was situated in Macedonia, a country near Greece. The gospel was first preached here by the apostle Paul. The design of this Epistle was to exhort the Philippians to live in love towards each other, and to comfort them under those troubles which they were called to endure from the persecutors of the Christians.

Second chapter and twenty-fifth verse.—"Epaphroditus, my brother and companion in labour, and fellow-soldier." As we have just seen that Christians are called to put on the whole armour of God ; so in the same manner are they considered as soldiers : for as soldiers have to contend with powerful foes, by whom they will be overcome if they do not overcome them, so the Christian must overcome the world, the flesh, and the devil, or these will overcome him. Devoted ministers of Christ, as Paul and Epaphroditus were, are soldiers, particularly exposed as leaders in this warfare.

THE EPISTLE TO THE COLOSSIANS.

Colosse was a city in Lesser Asia, which perished by an earthquake with several other cities. Soon after this Epistle was written a new city was built on its ruins. It is not known how the





Christian faith reached this place, and it is thought by some that the apostle Paul was not known there in person, because in the second chapter, and first verse, he seems to imply that they had not seen his face in the flesh; but this language is not quite certain, and does not exactly state any such thing. Some therefore think that the apostle Paul did preach here, for during three years that he dwelt at Ephesus, he employed himself with so much zeal and diligence, that we are told in the nineteenth chapter of the Acts, that "all they that dwelt in Asia, heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks." This, like some of the Epistles, is chiefly written to warn against making mistakes in religion, and to encourage to constancy in the profession of faith in Christ. It is to be noticed, that this Epistle, and that to the Ephesians are very much alike, from which it is thought that they were both written at the same time, while the same inspired thoughts were fresh on the mind of the apostle.

The second chapter and fourteenth verse. "Blotting out the hand-writing of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross." This means, that we owed obedience to God's law, and not having perfectly obeyed it, have become greatly in debt,—so much so, that it was impossible we could ever pay. But Jesus Christ became the surety for them that should believe in him, and by his obedience and satisfaction paid all their debt. Then as a debt no longer stands in a book of accounts against those who have paid it, but is blotted out and crossed over with the pen, so are our sins blotted out; and as in ancient times, old agreements were cancelled, or done away with by a nail being driven through them as a matter of form; so likewise when Christ died on the cross, all the claims of the holy law of God which we have broken, were rendered void. The broken law was satisfied by his obedience unto death, and so they who believe in him are henceforth free from all condemnation.

Fifteenth verse. "And having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it." Principalities and powers may mean wicked spirits, and death and hell, which are sometimes spoken of as if they were





persons ; and the wicked men in power who opposed Christ, and the progress of his kingdom. By the doctrines of his cross Christ has overcome all these. When he died, he led, as it were, all his enemies of every kind captive, and made a triumphant show of them before all the world of men and angels. So ancient conquerors spoiled their enemies of their armour, exhibited them with reproach to the public, and emperors, kings, queens, and generals, were marched before the chariot of the conqueror, the monarchs wearing their crowns, and all with their hands bound behind them. After this the unhappy captives were often led away for slaughter. This allusion shows how completely Christ has overcome all the enemies of his people,—as completely as did the conqueror who marched his foes in the triumphal procession.

THE FIRST AND SECOND EPISTLES TO THE THESSALONIANS.

Thessalonica was a very large and flourishing city, where trade was free, and the capital of Macedonia. The place is now called Salonica. Here the apostle came after he had been at Philippi, and staid there about three weeks, and preached every sabbath day. Many Jews, Greeks, and chief women of the place readily received the glad tidings of salvation, which he declared, and the foundation was laid of a gospel church. The wicked Jews, who despised the apostle's message, raised a mob, and assaulted the house of Jason, where Paul and Silas were, and they were sent away for safety by night out of the city. Timothy was soon after sent by the apostles to comfort and instruct the converts at this city. He was pleased with what he saw, and took back to the apostle a report of the faith and charity which appeared among the Thessalonians. The apostle then wrote the First Epistle, and some months afterwards he also wrote a Second, comforting the Christians in their troubles, and urging them to hold fast their profession.

An important expression occurs, which requires explanation, in *The First Epistle, fourth chapter and third verse*. "For this is the





will of God, even your sanctification." Sanctify means to set apart for holy purposes. Sanctification is the work of God's Holy Spirit upon our minds, making us more holy in our affections, desires, and pursuits, and therefore more holy in our lives.

THE FIRST AND SECOND EPISTLES TO TIMOTHY.

Timothy was remarkable for his early piety and acquaintance with the Scriptures. The apostle in writing to him says, "From a child thou hast known the Scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation, through faith which is in Christ Jesus." His mother, Eunice, was a Jewess, and his father was a Greek. When in his travels the apostle Paul came from Antioch the second time to Lystra, Timothy was so warmly recommended to him by the church in that place, that he took him with him as a travelling companion. He was set apart for the work of an Evangelist, in order to be a fellow-labourer with Paul in preaching the gospel. The apostle evidently had a tender regard for him, and these Epistles were written to him to give him useful advice in the work of the ministry.

The third chapter and eighth verse. "As Jannes and Jambres withstood Moses." Here we learn the name of two of the magicians of the Egyptians, who stood against Moses and Aaron when the miracles were wrought by the wonder-working rod. Their names seem to have been retained among the Jews, though they were not mentioned in the history written by Moses.

THE EPISTLE TO TITUS.

Titus was a Greek, to whom the apostle Paul had been the honoured messenger of preaching the gospel, and he had not received it in vain. Paul dearly loved him, and employed him much in assisting him to do his work; we read of his sending him to Corinth, to finish a collection there to assist the poor saints at Jerusalem, and to Dalmatia, to inquire after the saints there, and to comfort them. We do not read in the apostle's history that he





was ever at Crete, but from this Epistle it is thought that he was, for he says to Titus, "I left thee at Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders, or ministers, in every city, as I had appointed thee." Crete is the largest island in the Mediterranean Sea, and is now called Candia. This island has a considerable number of inhabitants, and is remarkable for producing no ferocious or poisonous creature. This Epistle was evidently written to teach Titus how to choose good men for pastors, and how to act himself as a minister of Jesus Christ.

THE EPISTLE TO PHILEMON.

This is a very short, but a very interesting Epistle. It is, in fact, a story about Onesimus, a converted servant, who ran away from his master Philemon, whom some think he robbed, and then went to Rome, where he heard the Apostle Paul preach, when his heart was changed. The kind apostle then wrote this most tender Epistle to Philemon, whom he knew, begging him to take his servant back into his service, for he was now become a truly good man, and what loss he had sustained by his absence the apostle assured Philemon he was quite ready to pay. It is supposed that Philemon lived at Colosse.

THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS.

This does not bear the name of the Apostle Paul, and is now generally believed to have been written by one of his disciples. Its purpose was to explain to the converted Hebrews, or Jews, the superiority of Christ to Moses, to Joshua, or Aaron; to prove that in his priesthood and death, all the work of the priests was completed, that he had made a perfect offering for sin, and that from henceforth there was no other way in which salvation could be expected, but through Christ. With these remarks you will be able to understand the general scope of this Epistle, many things to which it refers having been explained when we were treating on the book of Leviticus.





You will find a puzzling passage, which speaks of King Melchizedek, in *the seventh chapter and third verse*. "Without father, without mother, without descent, having neither beginning of days, nor end of life; but made like unto the son of God." In the hundred and tenth Psalm, the Messiah, that is, Christ, is prophesied of, who was to be "a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek." The apostle Paul is here proving to the Jews that Jesus Christ is that priest. The priests of Aaron were known to be of the tribe of Levi, and their descent was all correctly made out, but Christ is a priest after the order of Melchizedek. Of this person we read in the fourteenth chapter of Genesis, and his descent and death were not known; therefore he was a proper type of Jesus Christ, who was born of a woman, with only a reputed, and not a real father, of his flesh, Joseph; who had no mother, as a divine person, but God alone as his Father; who existed "from everlasting," and who is "alive for evermore," and, as a better priest than those of the line of Aaron, who continually died, "ever lives to make intercession for us;" "not with the blood of bulls and of goats, but with his own blood," which was offered once for all, and the efficacy of which now always pleads for sinners in the presence of God. This is the scope of the argument here followed up by the apostle, and which from these hints you will perhaps be able to understand. You see the apostle does not mean that Melchizedek really had no father nor mother, but there is no account of them; nor that Melchizedek being a man lived for ever, but there is no account of his ever dying. And from these and other circumstances, he formed a fit shadow of the divine and eternal person of Jesus, "the Great High Priest of our profession," who, having once offered up himself as a sacrifice of perpetual efficacy, is now gone into the heavens, "to appear in the presence of God for us."

Having come to the end of the Epistles of Paul, it may be proper before leaving them, to inform you, that the persons who wrote the Scriptures, before printing was in use, added the inscriptions at the end of the Epistles, saying from what places they were written, and as these do not form a part of the true Scriptures themselves, they are not always to be relied upon as correct. The





passages I mean, are the very last written under the last verse of each Epistle.

Finally, before we finish with the Epistles, let us call to recollection the following passages, which deserve particular notice from the young reader.

“Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.”—*Ephesians*.

“Children, obey your parents in all things, for this is well-pleasing unto the Lord.—*Colossians*.

Obedience to parents is a part of the divine law, and is often enforced in Scripture. And why so? Because young persons are apt to be headstrong, and to think that they know better than their parents; therefore they are here checked, as the headstrong horse is checked with the bridle. When, however, children are commanded to “obey in all things,” it must be understood, in all those things that are not wicked. If wicked parents command young persons to do wicked things, then they are to obey God rather than man; for no human being can have authority to command us to do that which is forbidden by God. When the commands of parents are opposed to those of God, they are, however, not to be resisted in a haughty or angry manner, but let the young person in such a case meekly say, God will not let me do it; and it must be a wicked parent indeed who will not be satisfied with such an answer, when the young person can give a scriptural reason for his not being willing to obey. Such a case, however, I say, is rare. May the young reader never see any occasion to be put to the pain of refusing to obey his dear parents.

THE GENERAL EPISTLE OF JAMES.

The Epistle of James is called “general,” because it was not written to any particular person. It was addressed “to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad.” These were not Christian Jews scattered abroad by persecution, but Jews who had been scattered over all countries by the captivity, numbers of whom never returned in consequence of Cyrus’s decree, but remained among the Gentiles. The author of this Epistle is thought





to be James the brother of Jude, and is known by the name of James the Less, probably because he was less in stature, or younger than James the Son of Zebedee, who was slain by Herod. Some of the Jews here addressed were pious men, and some not. This is clear from the different sorts of address which we find in the Epistle, some consoling and comforting, others warning and rebuking.

Fourth chapter and thirteenth verse. "Go to now," means with us, "come now." "Ye that say, to-day, or to-morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain." Eastern merchants and dealers differ from ours in general. They travel from place to place, and exchange their wares, making their profits upon every exchange. Thus a merchant takes an article from his own city, which is made there, and goes to a distance where that article is wanted, and exchanges it, at a great advantage, for some article sold in the city to which he travels. Then he goes again on his travels, and exchanges that second article elsewhere to the same advantage; and after being absent for a year or more, he will return home. Some merchants only deal in the first article, and go backwards and forwards to one city besides their own. In this way the Eastern trader now travels, taking with him his family, and dealing in gums, drugs, cloth, silk, muslins, jewels, precious stones, and other articles. So anciently they traded from city to city, carrying their goods on the backs of camels. The Jews traded thus to Tyre, Sidon, Cæsarea, Crete, Ephesus, Philippi, Thessalonica, Corinth, Rome, and other places. To this wandering, trading life, James here alludes, and blames those Jews whose minds were wholly given to it, thinking only of what they should buy and sell, and determining all that they should do, without ever thinking that if God did not bless and protect them, they could do nothing; and forgetting that while they enriched themselves on earth, they were making no provision for heaven; while they knew not how soon their life might be gone, like a passing vapour, and even could not reckon with certainty but it might be gone on the morrow.





THE FIRST AND SECOND EPISTLES GENERAL OF PETER.

These Epistles, like that of James, were addressed to scattered Jews, "strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia." These might include some remains of the ten tribes carried captive by the Assyrians, and of the two tribes carried captive by the Babylonians; but more especially are the Epistles addressed to suffering Christians, chiefly converted Jews, and some Gentiles, who were scattered abroad in the early persecutions of the Christian Church.

The apostle Peter was more especially sent to minister to the Jews, as the apostle Paul was to the Gentiles; and Peter meeting with a faithful brother, Silvanus, who had been the companion of Paul, takes an opportunity of sending a letter by him, chiefly addressed to the converted Jews, dispersed among the Gentile countries, where he with Paul and others travelled; the design of which was to show that both taught the same glorious doctrines. This was the First Epistle.

The Second Epistle was to urge those to whom the apostle wrote to be anxious after divine knowledge, to fix their minds on the gospel, to guard them against teachers that would instruct them in error, and to warn them of the approaching end of all things.

In the last chapter of the Second Epistle, we have a very solemn account of the day of judgment, and an assurance that as the world has once been destroyed by a flood, so it will again be destroyed by fire. "The Lord grant that we may find mercy of the Lord in that day."

THE FIRST EPISTLE GENERAL OF JOHN.

The author of this Epistle was John, the Son of Zebedee, the disciple whom Jesus loved: he was the youngest of the apostles, and survived them all. It was called "general," because it was not sent to any particular church or person. The design of writing it was to promote brotherly love, to warn against doctrines





that allowed men to live in sin, and give clear notions of the nature of God, and the divine glory of Jesus Christ. There is an anecdote of this apostle worthy of being remembered, both by young and old, whom the venerable John was used to address alike by the tender names of little children. It is said, in some early histories, that he spent his last days at Ephesus, where he died; and then when he was too old to walk, he was carried to the place of worship in the arms of some of the disciples. He could then only speak a few words very feebly; and these words always were, "Little children, love one another."

THE SECOND EPISTLE OF JOHN.

This, you see, is not called "general." It was written to a pious lady. The scope of it is to urge this pious lady to hold fast her Christian faith, to avoid error, and to love God and those who loved him.

THE THIRD EPISTLE OF JOHN.

This Epistle was to a particular person also. His name was Gaius, or Caius, and most likely the same mentioned by the apostle Paul for his kindness in receiving, and lodging, and entertaining good people. See the sixteenth chapter of Romans, near the end. In this Epistle, John speaks of one "Diotrephes," who was a very haughty man, which was not a proper mark of a Christian, and of one "Demetrius," who had a good report of all men, as every Christian should have, as far as respects his life, temper, and behaviour. The former he mentions, that Gaius may not imitate him; and the latter he holds up as an excellent example. We should always imitate the example of the truly wise and good.

THE GENERAL EPISTLE OF JUDE.

This is also an Epistle written to no particular person, but chiefly designed for the Jews who believed in Jesus Christ. Jude,



JOHN WRITING TO THE CHURCHES.





THE RIVER OF THE WATER OF LIFE.



or rather Judas, was the son of Alpheus, and brother of James the Less, or the younger. He was also called Lebbeus, and Thaddeus, for it was a frequent custom in those days to have two or more names ; so Peter was sometimes called Simon, and sometimes Cephas.

THE REVELATION OF ST. JOHN THE DIVINE.

Domitian, a Roman tyrant, banished the apostle John, for being a Christian, to a solitary and rocky island called Patmos, about thirty miles from the western coast of Asia Minor. The good man is never alone, for God is with him everywhere. Here



PATMOS.

God favored John with wonderful visions of what should hereafter happen to the Church and the world. The first three chapters of this book contain a sort of preface, addressed to the Seven Churches in Asia Minor ; namely, Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea. The remaining chapters are accounts of his vision.





We shall first notice the Seven Churches in Asia. These were not the only Churches in Asia Minor, for there were Churches in Phrygia, Pamphylia, Galatia, Pontus, Cappadocia, &c. &c., which were also in Asia Minor; but the apostle knew and wrote to these Seven Churches in particular. The first was *Ephesus*, of which we have made mention on several occasions. The second *Smyrna*, is at this time, the largest and richest city of Asia Minor. It contains about one hundred and forty thousand inhabitants, the largest number of which are Greeks; the rest are Turks, Jews, of whom there are eleven thousand, Armenians, Roman Catholics, and Protestants. It is a beautiful city, but frequently ravaged by the plague,—and has suffered by an earthquake.

The third church named is that of *Pergamos*. This city is now called Bergamo. It must in John's time have been a city of great importance, for it then had a manuscript library of two hundred thousand volumes, which Antony and Cleopatra, queen of Egypt, sent to Alexandria. It has now fourteen thousand inhabitants of different nations, but the houses are of wood, and look small and mean.

The fourth Church named is *Thyatira*. This place is situated in the midst of an extensive plain, which is nearly surrounded by mountains. Its houses are low, and chiefly of mud or earth. It now looks poor and mean. It was anciently, and still is, famous for dyeing, especially in scarlet.

The fifth Church mentioned is *Sardis*. This famed city was once the capital of King Croesus, the richest monarch that ever lived. He was defeated in the plain before the city by Cyrus, when it passed to the Persians. After the Persians were defeated by Alexander the Great, it surrendered to him, and then in time to the Romans. It was destroyed by a terrible earthquake in the reign of Tiberius, the Roman Emperor, who rebuilt it. Afterwards the different nations of Goths, Saracens, and Turks, one after another, ruined it in their wars, and it is nothing but desolation. A mere sprinkle of ruins of its former greatness remains. No Christians dwell on the spot; two Greeks only were lately living there to work a mill, and a few wretched Turkish huts were scattered among the ruins.





The sixth Church addressed was in *Philadelphia*. The Turks call this place Allah Shehr, or 'city of God.' There are now about three thousand houses on the spot, covering a space of ground running up the slope of three or four hills. The streets are filthy and the houses mean.

The seventh Church was that of *Laodicea*. There were two places so called in Asia Minor. This place is more desolate than any of the others, having been completely ruined by earthquakes. Its ruins cover three or four small hills, and are of very great extent, consisting of an aqueduct, theatre, amphitheatre, and other public buildings.

Some terms in these Epistles need here to be explained.

You will observe that each of the Epistles to the Seven Churches is addressed to the Angel of each Church. Angel means messenger, and a messenger of the gospel is a minister; therefore the meaning is, "to the minister of the Church at Ephesus;" and so for the rest.

"The Nicolaitanes" are mentioned in this Epistle. God is said to have hated the deeds of these people. They are thought to have been some who, while they pretended to love God, boasted of breaking his holy law; and God always hates such evil doings and doers.

Some remarkable fulfilments of what God said by the apostle John must also be noticed.

The Ephesians had gone back in their religion, which is what is meant by leaving their first love. God threatened them by his prophet, and he told them that he would remove their "candlestick" out of its place, if they did not repent. By this he meant, that he would quite take the light of the gospel away from them; and he did so. Ephesus is now a forlorn spot—it is no more.

Smyrna was mentioned in terms of approval, and no judgment was denounced against it. So, though they have but little gospel light, yet the candlestick has not been wholly removed out of its place, and the city itself is still large and flourishing. Of this Church, the venerable Polycarp was one of the pastors. In the year one hundred and sixty-two, about seventy years after this





Epistle was written, a persecution broke out against the Christians at Smyrna; and the Roman Emperors who had then dominion of those parts, treated them with shocking cruelty, because they would not serve their idols. The grey-headed Polycarp was marked for destruction. His friends concealed him in a village, but they were put to the torture to make them tell where he could be found. The old man could not bear that they should all suffer for him, and delivered himself up, saying, "The will of the Lord be done." When he was brought before the proconsul, one of the governors of Smyrna, he wished him not to be injured, and when he was examined, made signs that he should deny he was Polycarp, but Polycarp would not tell a falsehood. He then urged him to deny Christ, and promised him safety. "No," said the brave old man, "four score and six years have I served Christ; neither hath he ever wronged me at any time; how then can I deny my Saviour and King?" He was threatened with being thrown to the wild beasts, being burned and tormented, but he stood unmoved, saying, "You threaten me with fire, which shall last but an hour, and is quickly quenched; but you are ignorant of the everlasting fire of the day of judgment, and of those endless torments which are reserved for the wicked! But why do you delay? appoint me what death you please." The proconsul was astonished. He then commanded the crier to proclaim three times that Polycarp owned himself a Christian, and he was sentenced to the flames. In the midst of the flames, he thus prayed to his Father in heaven: "O God! the Father of thy beloved Son, Jesus Christ, and through whom we have received the knowledge of thee! O God, the Creator of all things, upon thee I call, thee I confess to be the true God; thee I glorify! O Lord, receive me, and make me a partaker of the resurrection of thy saints, through the merits of our Great High Priest, thy beloved Son, Jesus Christ, to whom with the Father and the Holy Spirit, be honour and glory for ever, Amen." Here was courage more than mortal; God helping his servant to put on the martyr's crown; and here was fulfilled what God said to Smyrna, "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life."

I wish you to understand that the rest of this book is very





difficult to explain, and can only in part be understood by those who are of riper years, and who well study and pray over it. I have said, I think, on the Prophecies, that they are written in dark terms, on purpose, because otherwise all the world would know them; and they are only designed to be a guide to those who wish to know the mind of God, and to mark his providence in his dealings with his Church.

I cannot therefore attempt to do more than to tell you, that most of the language here used, is the language of signs; that is, certain things are made to mean other things. John in his inspired visions saw all that he states; but then what he saw only represented realities in other forms. When he says in the first chapter, "I saw seven golden candlesticks," these meant the Seven Churches of Asia, because like candlesticks they held the light—they had the light of the gospel shining in them, while the Jews and Pagans around them were in the dark. So, when in the same chapter the Son of Man, Jesus Christ, is described with eyes of fire, and feet of brass, and a voice like the sound of many waters, you are not to suppose that this really is the form in which Jesus Christ now is, but this vision so showed him, to signify that as fire penetrates every thing, so he could see all hearts; as brass is durable, so are his promises and threatenings alike firm; and as there is something grand in the sound of many waters, so when he speaks in his word, he speaks with majesty and authority, and we ought to hear. The seven stars in his right hand mean the ministers of the Seven Churches, who were to be lights to them, as they were to all around; and the "sharp two-edged sword" in the mouth of the Son of Man, was to signify "the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God."

The seven seals which were to be opened, and the seven trumpets which were to be blown, are descriptions of seven periods of Christ's Church on earth, and of the divisions of those periods. They tell of the setting up of Christ's kingdom in the world,—of the triumphs of Paganism, and rise and fall of Popery, and other great errors; of the final triumph of the Gospel; the happy state of the Church of Christ; the Day of Judgment, and the eternal blessedness of the saints. May you and I, dear young





1158

CHILD'S COMMENTATOR.

reader, be found among the happy number, adoring Jesus, "the Lamb of God," who died for sinners, and singing for ever, "Salvation to our God, which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb!" Amen.



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THE HAND OF GOD IN HISTORY;

OR,

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By Rev. HOLLIS READ,

Author of "India and its People," "Palace of the Great King," "Commerce and Christianity,"
"The Coming Crisis," "Memoirs and Sermons of Rev. Dr. Armstrong."

"That all the people of the earth might know the hand of the Lord, that it is mighty."

History, when rightly written, is but a record of Providence; and he who would read history rightly, must read it with his eye constantly fixed on the hand of God. Every change, every revolution in human affairs, is, in the mind of God, a movement to the consummation of the great work of redemption. There is, no doubt, at the present time a growing tendency so to write, and so to understand history. "The history of the world is gradually losing itself in the history of the church." "The full history of the world is a history of redemption." "In no period of the history of redemption, not even when preparing the fulness of time for the Messiah's advent, has the providence of God been more marked than of late years, in its bearing on the extension of the Redeemer's kingdom." "The providence of God in respect to this work," says another, "would form one of the most interesting chapters in the history of His government."

"To the casual observer of Providence, to the ordinary reader of this world's history, the whole appears like a chaos of incidents, no thread, no system, no line of connection running through it. One course of events is seen here, and another there. Kingdoms rise on the stage one after another, and become great and powerful, and then pass away and are forgotten. And the history of the church seems scarcely less a chaos than the world. Changes are continually going on within it and around it, and these apparently without much order."

Yet all is not a chaos. The Christian student, with his eye devoutly fixed on the Hand of God, looks out upon the world, and back on the field of its history, and takes altogether a different view. What before seemed so chaotic and disorderly, now puts on the appearance of system and form. All is animated by one soul, and that soul is Providence.

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